

Furniture-making in London c. 1700-1870: craft, design, business and labour.

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FURNITURE-MAKING IN LONDON c. 1700-1870: CRAFT, DESIGN,

BUSINESS AND LABOUR

submitted for the degree of Ph. D.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of furniture-making in London in the years between about 1700 and 1870. The aims of the thesis are outlined in the introduction, which also explains why the years 1700-1870 were chosen. The special character of furniture-making in London, particularly its geographical location and the division between the 'honourable' and 'dishonourable' sectors of the trade, is discussed in the introduction. In Section A, the first two chapters cover the various crafts involved in furniture-making, the demarcations between them and the division of labour within them while Chapter 3 examines the craft training and the decline of the apprenticeship system. Section B deals with business organisation. Chapter 4 considers the ways in which the various crafts were brought together in firms and Chapter 5 examines the numbers employed and stock held therein. Section C analyses the split between craft, design and management. Chapter 6 concentrates on the entrepreneur furniture-maker and the development of his managerial role while Chapter 7 discusses the emergence of the professional designer. The involvement of furniture-makers in developments associated with the 'industrial revolution' is discussed in Section D. Chapters 8 and 9 consider the effect of new materials and techniques, including machinery, on furniture-making while Chapter 10 considers the involvement of furniture-makers in patents relating to furniture-making. The final section, E, examines the ways in which the London companies, in particular the Joiners' and the Upholders' Companies, and the journeymen's trade societies attempted to protect both the furniture-making trade and those who worked in it.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND PRESENTATION OF DOCUMENTS

Abbreviations used in footnotes

BL	British Library
BM	British Museum
CCR	Chamberlain's Court Records
CLRO	Corporation of London Record Office
<u>DEF</u>	Ralph Edwards and Percy Macquoid, <u>The Dictionary of English Furniture</u> , 3 vols, rev. ed., 1954
<u>DNB</u>	<u>Dictionary of National Biography</u>
FSOCM	Friendly Society of Operative Cabinet Makers
<u>GCM</u>	Ralph Edwards and Margaret Jourdain, <u>Georgian Cabinet-Makers c. 1700-1800</u> , rev. ed., 1955
GL	Guildhall Library
IR	Inland Revenue Records
JCR	Joiners' Company Records
<u>LFM</u>	Sir Ambrose Heal, <u>The London Furniture Makers. From The Restoration To The Victorian Era 1660-1840</u> , 1953
PP	Parliamentary Papers
<u>POD</u>	<u>Post Office Directory</u>
PRO	Public Record Office
UCR	Upholders' Company Records
V + A	Victoria and Albert Museum

Presentation of Documents

Where documents are quoted, the original spelling has been retained but capitalisation and punctuation have been modernised.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

INTRODUCTION

It is the intention of this thesis to:

- 1) outline the various furniture-making crafts, indicate the demarcations between them and show the ways in which they were sub-divided,
- 2) consider the apprenticeship system and the effect of its breakdown on furniture-making,
- 3) outline and analyse the development of the comprehensive manufacturing firms which dominated the West End trade until about 1870 and to contrast that trade with the 'cheap' trade centred in the East End,
- 4) examine the changing functions of the owner of a furniture-making firm, focussing on the division of labour between craft, design and management,
- 5) consider aspects of innovation and invention traditionally associated with the 'industrial revolution' as they related to furniture-making and to assess the part played by furniture-makers in such developments, and
- 6) study the institutions of craft guild and trade society and evaluate the particular ways in which they represented and protected 'the trade' and those who worked in it.

Historians of the manufacturing sector of the economy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have concentrated on 'path-breaking' trades such as textiles, coal and iron which are associated with the 'industrial revolution'¹. They have neglected, if not ignored, furniture-making which was a handicraft in 1700 and was not greatly affected by mechanisation by 1870. Emphasis has recently been placed on the continuation of handicraft production in a range of trades, including furniture-making, in the nineteenth century² but, as yet, there is no detailed study of furniture-making which covers the period between 1700 and 1870.

Edward Joy's M.A. thesis, 'Some Aspects of The London Furniture Industry In The Eighteenth Century', 1955, devoted approximately twenty thousand words to furniture craftsmen and the structure of the London trade in eighteenth century London³ but there is no similar study for the nineteenth century. J.L. Oliver's The Development and Structure of the Furniture Industry, 1966, adds little to previous studies of the eighteenth century while his analysis of the structure of the industry in the nineteenth century is based mainly on locational changes⁴. Nevertheless, Oliver provides a detailed account of those changes and useful comparative data are given for 1859 and 1872, the two years he studied in detail.

Since 1964, a more scholarly approach to the history of furniture and furniture-making has been apparent, largely through the efforts of the Furniture History Society, founded in that year⁵. A series of articles as well as lengthier studies, including Karin-M. Walton's M.Phil. thesis on eighteenth century upholstery⁶, have provided a more solid base for wider studies such as the present work. However, certain aspects of the subject remain neglected. There is no clear account of the various crafts which constituted furniture-making nor of the ways in which they were brought together within firms. Apprenticeship and other aspects of the guild system have not been studied in detail from the point of view of furniture-making but perhaps the most neglected area of all is the history of the craftsmen who made the furniture. Labour history is now an accepted area of historical study but, with few exceptions⁷, little attention has been paid to furniture-makers. It is hoped that this thesis will shed some new light on these topics.

There has been a considerable amount written about individual firms and designers but these studies have remained isolated, with little analysis of either the entrepreneurial role of the furniture-maker or the

rise of the professional designer. Both these themes are dealt with in this thesis, as is that of innovation and invention. Edward Joy dealt with the latter in English Furniture 1800-1851, 1977, and Section D of this thesis owes a great deal to him. However, I have questioned the role ascribed to furniture-makers by Edward Joy and have investigated the areas of greatest concern to them.

This study uses sources, such as trade guides, trade directories and royal household accounts, which are well-known to furniture historians. Other sources, such as apprenticeship and company records have been used more extensively than in other studies concerning furniture-making. Sources not hitherto utilised by historians of furniture and furniture-making, such as bankruptcy records, Chancery records, trade society records and workshop inventories, have also been used. Nevertheless, there remains some patchiness in the evidence, particularly for the early eighteenth century. Most documents do not consistently cover the entire period between 1700 and 1870: for instance, only a selection of bankruptcy records have been preserved at the Public Record Office while the number of complete workshop inventories is few. Other sources are equally limited. The Inland Revenue apprenticeship records do not start until 1711 and end in the early years of the nineteenth century while accounts of the trade by working craftsmen all date from the nineteenth century. There is sufficient evidence, however, to warrant a new study of furniture-making in the years between 1700 and 1870.

This study opens in 1700 because the main furniture-making crafts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were established by then but the comprehensive manufacturing firm, which brought together those crafts, had not developed. In 1700, the guilds still retained some control over furniture-making and the journeymen furniture-makers had not yet organised permanent institutions of their own. In the early eighteenth century, the

owner of a furniture-making firm combined the roles of craftsman and manager, as well as that of designer if the firm worked to original designs, whereas by 1870 all three functions were separate. However, the main reason why 1870 was chosen as a convenient, if somewhat approximate, date to close this study is that it marks the eclipse of the central position of the West End trade and the decline of the comprehensive manufacturing firm within metropolitan furniture-making. Furthermore, the 1870s mark the end of the independence of local trade societies of London furniture-makers and the increasing strength of nationally organised trade unions.

London was a thriving commercial, financial and manufacturing centre in 1700. It housed the royal court and was the seat of government⁸. It led the nation in matters of taste and was a centre of 'conspicuous consumption'⁹. The wealth of London attracted many. Skilled craftsmen were lured from the provinces by the relatively high wages in the capital¹⁰. Foreigners also came; some to escape persecution, others more specifically to work in the luxury and consumer trades, including furniture-making, which played such a vital part in the manufacturing life of the capital. London was the largest city in the kingdom throughout the period 1700 to 1870. Its population increased enormously in those years, as did that of the whole country. London grew from about 575,000 in 1700 to about 675,000 in 1750¹¹, reaching over 900,000 in 1801 when it accounted for approximately one-tenth of the population of England and Wales¹². Between 1801 and 1871, London grew at the rate of 16-21% per decade, a rate much slower than the industrial towns of the north and Midlands¹³. In 1871, however, London was still by far the largest city, with an enormous population of over three and a quarter millions, accounting for about one-seventh of the population of England and Wales¹⁴. Although furniture made in London was sold to all parts of Britain and abroad, her own population

provided a huge domestic market. It was a changing market: the growth of the middle class meant that an increasing number of people could afford to buy a wide range of furniture and furnishings for their homes¹⁵.

For much of the period, it is not known how many furniture-makers there were in total in London. It was estimated, however, that there were 6,610 cabinet-makers and upholsterers in London in 1831¹⁶, about 6,500-7,000 in 1841¹⁷ and nearly 8,000 in 1850¹⁸. There were upwards of 8,500 cabinet-makers, upholsterers, chair-makers and bedstead-makers in the capital in 1841, according to the census returns¹⁹ and one contemporary writer put the total number of furniture-makers in London in 1851 at just over 16,000²⁰. P. G. Hall has estimated that, in 1861, there were 20-30,000 furniture-makers in London²¹. These included masters as well as men and skilled as well as unskilled.

Furniture-making was organised at many levels²². However, this study concentrates on actual manufacturers; retail firms are included only in so far as they affected the manufacturing trade. Manufacturing itself was organised in different ways, from the individual master craftsman to firms which incorporated only one or two crafts, to large concerns. This thesis focuses primarily on what, for the purpose of this study, I have termed the comprehensive manufacturing firm because it brought together a variety of furniture-making crafts within a single firm and produced a comprehensive range of furniture and furnishings. Such firms were an outstanding and distinguishing feature of the quality trade in London to about 1870. They manufactured all their own furniture, which they also retailed, and formed the hub of the quality trade. The cheap or 'dishonourable' trade, which was responsible for the demise of the comprehensive firm which made its own goods on its own premises, deserves detailed consideration in its own right. It is discussed in this thesis mainly in terms of the way in which it affected and contrasted

with the quality trade.

The areas of London in which furniture-making was concentrated changed in the years between 1700 and 1870. In 1700, the location of furniture-making was shifting westwards, as the wealthier classes occupied the new residential areas built in the west of London after the Great Fire of 1666. The main furniture-making area in 1700 was St. Paul's Churchyard but, by mid-century, it had been superseded by the Long Acre-St. Martin's Lane area²³. Many skilled craftsmen found work even further to the west, in the area around Soho Square, Golden Square and Carnaby Market²⁴. By the 1790s, the Bond Street Area was popular while Piccadilly, New Bond Street and Oxford Street formed the centre of the West End trade in the early nineteenth century²⁵. This area was still important in 1870 but the focal point of the trade had by then shifted to the Tottenham Court Road area²⁶. However, these were only the main centres: furniture was made outside them throughout the period. Furniture continued to be made in St. Paul's Churchyard, for instance, and the largest firm in the second half of the eighteenth century, Seddon of Aldersgate Street, had premises in the area just north of the City where land was cheaper than in the West End²⁷.

J.L. Oliver, who charted the location of furniture-making establishments in the nineteenth century, estimated that there were sixty-six firms in the City and East End in 1801, with Aldersgate Street and St. Paul's Churchyard predominating²⁸. A shift further east was accelerated by the opening of new docks in the early nineteenth century and the establishment of nearby timber yards and saw mills which supplied a growing East End furniture trade²⁹. They mainly supplied materials to 'trade working masters', i.e. men who employed a small number of men, usually between two and five, and worked to orders given them by large establishments³⁰. Manufacturing firms, most of them small, which retailed

their own goods, formed part of the East End trade but it was the supply of goods to outside establishments which characterised the trade.

This trade came to be known as the 'dishonourable' trade and, although some quality work was produced in the East End, the geographical division between east and west broadly represented that between the 'honourable' and 'dishonourable' sectors of furniture-making³¹. It is impossible to understand developments in the West End trade from about 1820 without considering the increasing threat of the East End trade. The 'trade working masters' who supplied the retailers were joined, from the 1830s, by a proliferation of independent producers whose goods were sold at cheap prices to middlemen or 'warehousemen' who, in turn, supplied the retail shops³². These petty producers either worked on their own or with only a few unskilled assistants, usually young boys. They frequently worked in their own room or garret, hence the name 'garret master' by which they were known³³. They often worked without orders, speculatively 'hawking' their goods from one warehouse to another until they were sold³⁴. They made little profit, and sometimes a loss, because by late on a Saturday they were willing to accept low prices in order to buy new materials and food for their families in the coming week³⁵. The 'dishonourable' trade was based on low wages, very long hours, inferior materials, scamped workmanship, unskilled or child labour and sub-contracting. This system of organising production, known as the 'sweating system', was firmly established in the East End during the depressed 1830s and 40s.

Competition from the 'dishonourable' sector, which sold to retail establishments, many of which were located in the Tottenham Court Road area³⁶ and sold goods bought in the East End under their own name³⁷, affected the 'honourable' trade³⁸. Although sub-contracting or buying goods not previously ordered from middlemen meant that more people had to make a

profit, goods could be supplied more cheaply than the large comprehensive firms could make them³⁹. By mid-century even the best West End firms were forced, on occasions, to use inferior materials or lower the earnings of their workers because their customers were not always prepared to pay for quality production. Contracts from the Office of Works, for instance, were nearly always given to the lowest tender submitted by one of the half-dozen or so leading furniture-making firms chosen to estimate for the work. A representative of the firm of Holland, whose tenders were sometimes a great deal lower than those of its rivals⁴⁰, confessed to lowering prices for jobs and using inferior materials on government work because of the pressure to produce cheap work⁴¹.

It was this pressure to produce cheaply together with the competition from the East End trade, which led to the decline of the West End trade based on the manufacture of quality goods. By 1861 the percentage of furniture-makers working in the East End was slightly greater than that in the West End, the former accounting for 31% and the latter for 28% of the total number of London furniture-makers⁴². The number of West End furniture-making establishments declined in the 1860s⁴³ and, in the 1870s, the East End superseded the West End as the largest furniture-making centre in London, in terms of both workers and number of establishments.⁴⁴ The era of the comprehensive manufacturing firm producing quality goods with skilled labour, much of it organised in trade societies, had passed.

Footnotes

- 1 David Landes, The Unbound Prometheus, 1969; Phyllis Deane, The First Industrial Revolution, 1969; T.S. Ashton, The Industrial Revolution 1760-1830, rev. ed., New York, 1964; and Paul Mantoux, The Industrial Revolution in the Eighteenth Century, rev. ed., 1961
- 2 Raphael Samuel, 'Workshop of the World: Steam Power and Hand Technology in mid-Victorian Britain', History Workshop, Issue 3, Spring 1977, pp. 6-72
- 3 E.T. Joy, 'Some Aspects Of The London Furniture Industry In The Eighteenth Century', unpublished M.A. thesis, University of London 1955, pp. 10-85
- 4 J.L. Oliver, The Development and Structure of the Furniture Industry, 1965
- 5 see Peter Thornton and F.J.B. Watson, 'The Present State of Furniture Studies', The Burlington Magazine, Nov 1969, pp. 645-7 and Editorial, 'The Furniture History Society', The Burlington Magazine, June 1980, p. 379
- 6 Karin-Marina Walton, 'Eighteenth-Century Upholstery in England, With Particular Emphasis On The period 1754-1803: The Work and Status of The Upholsterer', unpublished M. Phil. thesis, University of Leeds, 1980
- 7 They are Norman Robertson, 'A Study of the Development of Labour Relations in the British Furniture Trade', unpublished B. Litt, thesis, University of Oxford, 1955 and David George Blankenhorn, 'Cabinet Makers in Victorian Britain. A Study of Two Trade Unions', Essay in part requirement for M.A., University of Warwick, 1978
- 8 E.A. Wrigley, 'A Simple Model of London's Importance in Changing English Society and Economy 1650-1750', Past and Present, no. 37, July 1967, pp. 44-70, particularly pp. 44-5, and F.J. Fisher, 'The Development of London As A Centre of Conspicuous Consumption in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 4th series, vol. XXX, 1948, pp. 37-50
- 9 ibid.
- 10 Basil Williams, The Whig Supremacy, 1714-1760, rev. ed., 1962, p. 125 and Wrigley, op. cit., p. 60
- 11 Wrigley, op. cit., p. 44
- 12 Francis Sheppard, London 1808-1870: The Infernal Wen, 1971, p. xvii
- 13 ibid., p. xviii
- 14 ibid., p. xviii
- 15 see Deane, Industrial Revolution, pp. 200 + 264-6; Mantoux, Industrial Revolution, pp. 134-5 + 365-78; George Rudé, Hanoverian London 1714-1808, 1971, pp. 52-60; E.J. Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire: An Economic History of Britain since 1750, 1969, pp. 17-19 + 63-6; and S.G. Checkland, The Rise of Industrial Society in England 1815-1885, 1966, pp. 290-308

- 16 Morning Chronicle, Letter XXXIV, 11 Feb 1850
- 17 ibid., and Henry Mayhew, 'Of The Furniture Workers', Letter LXII, Morning Chronicle, 1 Aug 1850
- 18 Morning Chronicle, Letter XXXII, 4 Feb 1850
- 19 Morning Chronicle, 1 Aug 1850
- 20 John Weale, ed., London Exhibited in 1851, 1851, p. 61
- 21 P.G. Hall, The Industries of London since 1861, 1962, pp. 183-4
- 22 Joy, 'Furniture Industry', pp. 15-50
- 23 ibid., p. 56 and Oliver, Furniture Industry, p. 7
- 24 Joy, op. cit., p. 56 and Oliver, op. cit., p. 9
- 25 Joy, op. cit., pp. 61-2 and Oliver, op. cit., pp. 28-9
- 26 Oliver, op. cit., pp. 35 + 64
- 27 see p. 144
- 28 Oliver, Furniture Industry, pp. 25-7
- 29 J.L. Oliver, 'A Study of the Location and Migration of the Furniture Industry in Metropolitan England', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1963, pp. 75-6
- 30 Henry Mayhew, Morning Chronicle, Letter LXVI, 22 Aug 1850
- 31 ibid., and Henry Mayhew, 'Of The Fancy Cabinet-Makers of London', Letter LXIV, Morning Chronicle, 15 Aug 1850
- 32 Morning Chronicle, 22 Aug 1850
- 33 ibid.
- 34 ibid. see also PP. 1888 (13), vol. XX, Sweating System, pp. 215-7, 'Hawking' also took place in the cheap end of the Parisian trade in the mid-nineteenth century. M.D. Wyatt, 'On Furniture and Decoration', Reports On The Paris Universal Exhibition, Part 1, 1856, p. 284
- 35 Morning Chronicle, 22 Aug 1850. see also PP.1888, Sweating System, p. 209
- 36 Oliver, Furniture Industry, pp. 31-4
- 37 Morning Chronicle, 1 Aug 1850 and PP.1888, Sweating System, p. 209
- 38 Morning Chronicle, 15 Aug 1850
- 39 PP. 1888, Sweating System, p. 521

- 40 Of tenders submitted in 1856 for furniture for offices in the House of Lords, Holland's was £2,959 3s 0d while the next lowest, Gillow's, was £3,139 15s 0d. Jackson and Graham's was £4,480 10s 0d and Clement's £5,594 5s 0d. PRO Works 11/8 (9)
- 41 PP. 1888, Sweating System, pp. 520-1
- 42 Hall, Industries of London, p. 72
- 43 Oliver, Furniture Industry, p. 42
- 44 ibid., pp. 43-5

CHAPTER 1

THE FURNITURE-MAKING CRAFTS: 1) THE WOODWORKING CRAFTS

THE FURNITURE-MAKING CRAFTS: 1) THE WOODWORKING CRAFTS

There was a variety of crafts involved in furniture-making in the years c.1700-1870. Although they were brought together in furniture-making workshops, the crafts were quite individual and separate from one another. The craft or 'mystery' was the skill learned in apprenticeship, practised as a journeyman and handed down as a master. There was a hierarchy of London crafts and trades, with some considered more 'aristocratic' than others¹. Some crafts required greater artistic or other special skills but this was not the only factor which affected the position occupied by a particular craft in the hierarchy. The nature of the materials used and the working conditions also determined the status of the craft². The woodworking side of furniture-making, for instance, was generally more laborious and dirty than upholstery, which dealt with materials which were not only clean but often also expensive and, therefore, upholstery was considered more 'genteel' than chair-making or cabinet-making. Wages and earnings, the capital required to purchase tools or set up in business and the often quoted but ill-defined factor of custom also affected the status of a craft³. Within furniture-making, the less skilled crafts, such as bedstead-making and chair-making, were at the bottom of the hierarchy. Near the top came cabinet-making which was considered superior to any woodworking craft except carving⁴. It was upholstery, however, which was considered the most respectable of the furniture-making crafts⁵.

The joiner was the main woodworking furniture-maker in the seventeenth century⁶. The Joiners' Company of London emerged triumphant from a demarcation dispute with the Carpenters' Company in 1632, which established the right of joiners to make bedsteads, tables, chairs, forms, chests, cabinets, cupboards, presses and picture frames⁷. In the late seventeenth century, however, the joiner was ousted from his position as the main furniture-making craftsman and was

replaced by the cabinet-maker, the chair-maker and the frame-maker. In the eighteenth century, joiners were employed by furniture-makers but they only did jobs such as making window shutters, window blinds and panelling, all of which lay outside furniture-making proper⁸.

cabinet-making

Cabinet-making developed out of the joiner's craft in the years between 1660 and 1690 as a result of new fashions in design introduced after the Restoration. The court and upper classes, many of whom had been in exile, wanted furniture comparable with that obtainable in France and Holland. A lighter type of case furniture was developed using walnut, which demanded greater skill in working than the softer oak previously used. Much of it involved the new technique of veneering, by which a thinly-sliced layer of wood was adhered to a solid base. The fashion for marquetry or highly decorative inlaid veneer work accelerated the separation of the cabinet-maker, the specialist in this new type of cabinet work and veneering, from the joiner.

The term cabinet-maker was used immediately after the Restoration when Adrian Bolte applied for the post of royal cabinet-maker¹⁰ and it was used in the following year to refer to certain members of the Joiners' Company¹¹. John Evelyn used the term in his Sylva, 1664¹², and Samuel Pepys referred to the person who made 'a new inlaid table' in 1667 as a cabinet-maker¹³. The taste of the court and upper classes, the large scale re-building and re-furnishing after the Great Fire of 1666 and the presence of foreign designers and craftsmen skilled in the new styles and techniques all encouraged the growth of the new craft.

It took time, however, before the term cabinet-maker was widely used and the speed with which cabinet-making emerged as a clearly distinguishable and separate craft should not be exaggerated. Even in

the royal accounts, cabinet-makers do not figure largely in the supply of furniture before about 1680. Until that date, most of the royal furniture consisted of hangings, beds and chairs, with only a few tables and cabinets supplied by cabinet-makers.

The improvement in the standard of English cabinet-making, which John Evelyn commented upon in 1680¹⁴, came about largely because of the influence of foreign craftsmen working in England. The improvements are best represented in the work of Gerrit Jensen, probably of Dutch or Flemish origin, who first supplied furniture to the royal household in 1680¹⁵. With his appointment, a more elaborate type of cabinet work, which was often decorated with marquetry or buhl, a highly decorative form of inlay using metal and tortoise-shell, appears in bills presented to the Lord Chamberlain's Office¹⁶. Apart from William Farmborough¹⁷, the cabinet-makers who supplied furniture to the royal household in the last twenty years of the seventeenth century were foreign. Richard Vanhuissen was employed in the 1680s¹⁸ and John Guillibande, Peter Pavie and Cornelius Gole, son of the famous Flemish-born Parisian furniture-maker Pierre Gole, all worked for the Lord Chamberlain's Office in the 1690s¹⁹. The elaborate nature of Gole's work is shown by the 'table dolphin fashion inlaid and graved and richly carved and gilt the frame richly carved and gilt suitable with several figures festons to' made in 1690 at a cost of £50²⁰.

The 1690s also saw an increase in cabinet-makers working in the trade in general. Sir Ambrose Heal's published list of London furniture-makers records very few cabinet-makers in the years 1660 to 1700²¹. Of those listed, sixteen can be confirmed as working as cabinet-makers in those years and of those, three were active in the 1670s, three in the 1680s and ten in the 1690s. Judging by their surnames, at least half of the latter group were native born craftsmen, indicating that the craft had been taken up by British workmen by the 1690s. The term cabinet-maker was

in general use by the end of the seventeenth century, by which time there was a distinct division of labour between joiner and cabinet-maker in London.

The cabinet-maker needed 'a much lighter hand and a quicker eye than the joiner' and was 'the most curious workman in the wood way, except the carver'²². Though somewhat laborious, the job required 'more ingenuity than strength'. The cabinet-maker also needed to be able to 'write a good hand, understand arithmetic, and have some notion of drawing and designing'²³. By the mid-eighteenth century, when cabinet-making was considered to have reached standards of great perfection in England²⁴, the cabinet-maker worked chiefly in mahogany and walnut and made many items of furniture including chests-of-drawers and bookcases as well as cabinets and tables²⁵.

The cabinet-maker was trained to make these pieces of furniture in their entirety. There is some evidence, however, that within two major comprehensive furniture-making firms in the 1760s, certain parts for tables, particularly legs and feet, were made separately from the rest. This raises the question of whether or not all the parts for each particular table were made by the same craftsman. An inventory taken in 1760 of the stock of Paul Saunders included '10 setts of mahogany table feet ... 26 mahogany feet for breakfast tables ... 30 wainscot table feet ... 12 pair of card table legs ... 6 tops for breakfast tables part varnished'²⁶, while that taken three years later of the stock of William Linnell included '222 Marlborough feet for tables and chairs ... 35 table legs with turned toes'²⁷. Because the evidence comes from inventories taken during the working life of the firms, it is possible that these items were part of work in progress and represent the sum total of different parts made by several craftsmen. The thirty-five table legs, for instance, could have been made by several different craftsmen because, together, they do not provide sufficient for nine four-legged tables. If half the 222 Marlborough

legs listed in the Linnell inventory were for tables, twenty-five four-legged tables could have been produced. These parts therefore could represent the work of several cabinet-makers, each of whom was making one or two tables from start to finish.

On the other hand, the inclusion of particular parts, such as table legs, in both inventories and the relatively large number of parts involved suggest that there was a certain division of labour operating within these firms. Table legs and feet were usually fairly repetitive and routine items which may have been made in quantity and stored ready-made for use when needed. The inclusion of wainscot items suggests that this type of work may have been restricted to the cheaper items. Apprentices may have been put to these more repetitive jobs but, in high class firms such as Linnell or Saunders, this would have been for only a short period of time until a particular job was learned, because apprentices in the quality trade were given an all-round training²⁸. Such work probably represented a rational use of time: when complete tables were not being made then cabinet-makers made some of the component parts which were used on a wide variety of tables.

Despite this small degree of sub-divided labour, if that is what these component parts represent, cabinet-makers were still expected to be able to make any item of cabinet work from start to finish. This remained the case in the quality trade in the mid-nineteenth century when Henry Mayhew reported that cabinet-makers were expected to make every item of furniture apart from chairs and bedsteads²⁹. They could be asked to work on anything from the 'smallest comb-tray to the largest bookcase' but they mainly made tables, cabinets, chiffoniers, sideboards, wardrobes, bookcases and chests-of-drawers. The cabinet-maker cut out all the parts of a particular piece and made it 'without any subdivision of labour'³⁰.

The unspecialised nature of cabinet-making in the quality trade in the mid-nineteenth century is confirmed by Matthew Digby Wyatt. In 1856, he reported on the furniture displayed at the Paris Exhibition of 1855 and argued that the poor quality of British design and production was due, in part, to the lack of division of labour³¹. He recommended the abolition of the piece-rate price books used in the West End and the introduction of a 'better' division of labour whereby 'the men would be kept each one at a particular process of which he was the most thorough master'. He felt that this, together with the introduction of more processes, would lead to better and cheaper furniture³². But even by the end of the century, when the supremacy of the West End trade had declined, there was little division of labour in the quality cabinet trade³³.

The development of the comprehensive manufacturing firms in the quality trade ensured that a wide range of cabinet work was undertaken and gave the cabinet-maker the opportunity to retain all-round skills. It was the smaller firms, some of them producing good quality work, however, which restricted their scope. Thomas Sheraton commented in 1792 that craftsmen were 'sometimes strangers to particular pieces of furniture' because certain pieces were made in one shop and not in another³⁴. It was this type of production rather than a division of labour within workshops which produced specialisation in cabinet work.

For most of the eighteenth century, there was little specialisation. Even when the increasing use of specialised rooms led to a great demand for a wide variety of tables in the second half of the eighteenth century³⁵, there was no division of labour between table-making and other aspects of cabinet-making. The exception was the production of games tables, particularly backgammon and billiards tables. In this case, it was not simply demand which affected specialisation but also the fact that very particular skills were involved. In the case of backgammon tables, a

particular type of inlaid top was used while billiards tables required a special bed and carefully laid baize cover. Certain craftsmen, either working on their own or employing others, specialised in this type of work. John Sheraton of Chancery Lane, for instance, was described as a 'backgammon-table-maker' in 1750³⁶, as was Moses Ellis of nearby Fetter Lane in 1763³⁷. In 1780, a Mr. Deeker of Berwick Street, Soho, described himself as a maker of backgammon and billiards tables³⁸. At the same time, however, such items were also made in comprehensive manufacturing firms.

When William Lovett, who later became a well-known Chartist, worked for a small shop in Somers Town in North London in the early 1820s, he was kept mainly at making commodes, cabinets, loo-tables and card-tables³⁹. Lovett, however, was not at that time fully trained in cabinet-making, having served his time at another craft⁴⁰. When he was trained and a fully paid up member of the cabinet-makers' trade society he was able to find employment in better shops⁴¹. There, where the workers had put up some resistance to the erosion of the apprenticeship system, craftsmen still used a wide repertoire of skills.

In the cheaper trade, by contrast, the pressure to increase productivity and reduce costs forced firms into making only a limited range of goods and sub-dividing the craft of cabinet-making. Masters trained boys to only a reasonable competence and in only one aspect of a job⁴². Some specialisation took place in the production of cheap tables in the second half of the eighteenth century⁴³ but this remained the exception rather than the rule before the development of the 'slop' trade from the 1820s. Conditions in that sector of the trade deteriorated considerably after about 1835 and took a distinct turn for the worse in 1848, a year of general depression in trade. So numerous were the sub-divisions within 'slop' cabinet-making in 1850 that Henry Mayhew considered it unnecessary to list them all because they were 'as numerous as the articles of the cabinet-

maker's calling'⁴⁴. Garret-masters specialised in order to survive. Cabinet-makers were reduced to making nothing but tables or, in some cases, loo-tables⁴⁵, but even this became further sub-divided. In the 1850s, it was common in the 'dishonourable' sector for one man to make the table legs while another made the rest of the table⁴⁶. One man, who discussed his situation with Henry Mayhew, had managed to work as a cabinet-maker until 1848 but, because of the serious unemployment in that year, was forced into making looking-glass frames after a period without work⁴⁷. He kept at this speciality out of necessity because he found that when other work came his way he could not afford to do it since he lost time changing from one job to another. The most extreme illustration of the extent to which the division of labour had progressed by the mid-nineteenth century is the case of the craftsman who had served an apprenticeship as a drawer-maker - in itself a small sub-division of cabinet-making - but who by 1850 could find work only as a tassel turner⁴⁸.

The diary and accounts kept by Henry Price, a non-apprenticed furniture-maker who learned cabinet-making in the United States of America where he emigrated in 1842, provide details of the division of labour in firms in the cheaper end of the trade in the 1850s and 60s. Price returned to England in 1848 and, in 1850, went to London to find work. He had difficulty in obtaining work in decent shops not only because of his lack of apprenticeship but also because he could not perform certain tasks expected of an all-round cabinet-maker. Those he could do were not always up to London standards or did not conform to customary trade practices, American methods being cruder⁵⁰. The jobs he did obtain meant that he either made a small part of one item such as drawers for chests-of-drawers or else was kept at a limited number of items. The firms for which he worked concentrated production on a few items or particular types of furniture such as kitchen or bedroom furniture which were then sold to the

public or, more often, to the larger shops in the Tottenham Court Road area. In the years 1851-4, Price worked for at least seven different firms and, within that time, worked at making wardrobes, chiffoniers, rising side-tables, bookcases, dining-tables, fire screens, meat safes, kitchen furniture and library-tables⁵¹. At no shop, however, did he work on any more than three items. Once working in this sub-divided sector, it was difficult to rise out of it, especially if, like Price, one had not had an all-round cabinet-making training.

In a situation where journeymen worked at sub-divided tasks, it is not surprising that young people brought up in the trade, 'some apprenticed, some merely engaged or discharged at leisure', were not taught all aspects of cabinet-making⁵². It was claimed that four out of five could do nothing well but their own particular branch and only that as far as 'celerity in production' was concerned⁵³. By 1870, the use of boys to do repetitive tasks was a well established feature of cabinet-making in the 'dishonourable' trade⁵⁴. Besides those who worked at a single aspect of the cabinet-maker's craft - albeit often a minute one - other youths and unskilled workers were used simply to prepare or finish items. The majority of these preparers and finishers, as they were called, were young but they were not exclusively so⁵⁵. The use of boys was only a particularly exploitative use of cheap labour in a section of the furniture trade based on an extreme division of labour.

cabinet small-work or fancy cabinet-making

Fancy cabinet-makers have been ignored by historians yet, in 1850, Henry Mayhew claimed that they made all the lighter and more portable articles of furniture⁵⁶. In the language of the craft, such furniture-makers were 'small-workers', making items such as ladies' work-tables and work-boxes, ladies' desks, portable desks, writing-tables, jewel-boxes and dressing-cases.

Some also made other small items including card, glove, knife, gun and pistol cases and cribbage, chess and backgammon boards as well as tea-chests and caddies⁵⁷. The term 'fancy' was not applied to cabinet small-work until about 1820 and the latter term continued to be used throughout the nineteenth century⁵⁸. 'Fancy' implied novelty, as in the reference in the 1808 chair-makers' piece-rate book to 'the great variety which fancy is ever crowding into this branch of manufacture'⁵⁹. It also referred to the use of 'fancy' or highly figured woods which were widely used for cabinet small-work.

Cabinet small-work began to emerge as a process separate from cabinet-making in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Case-making developed as a specialisation as certain cabinet-makers concentrated on the production of small items. John Folgham, for instance, who ran a cabinet- and case-making firm in the 1780s, specialised in small ware such as medal and knife-cases, illustrating the latter on his bill headings⁶⁰. Thomas Sheraton illustrated knife-cases in his Drawing Book of 1793 and commented that 'these cases are not made in regular cabinet shops', citing John Lane of 44 St. Martins-le-Grand as someone who specialised in this type of cabinet small-work⁶¹. Sheraton, however, showed other small items but made no reference to these being produced by specialist craftsmen⁶².

Within the next few years, the distinction between the cabinet-maker and the cabinet small-worker increased. Thomas Handford, of 94 The Strand, was recorded as a writing-desk-maker in 1802-4 and, in the latter year, as a portable desk-maker⁶³. The publication in 1806 of The Portable Desk-Maker and Cabinet Small-Workers' London Book of Prices⁶⁴ indicates that there was a sufficient number of small-workers such as Handford to warrant their own piece-rate book, independent of that of the cabinet-makers

on which it was probably modelled. The London Cabinet Makers' Union Book of Prices, 1811⁶⁵, however, still included knife-cases and cellarets, suggesting that, at the same time as certain cabinet-makers specialised exclusively in small-work, general cabinet-makers were also expected to turn their hand to certain items of small-work.

Small cabinet work increased rapidly after the introduction of steam-powered veneer cutting machinery in London about 1825⁶⁶. The introduction of machinery meant not only that veneers were cut more quickly but also that more veneers per inch could be obtained⁶⁷. The importance of cheap veneers to the development of this side of the furniture trade cannot be over emphasised. By 1850, all veneers used in fancy cabinet-making were cut by machinery and the trade acknowledged its dependence upon them. One fancy cabinet-maker remarked that 'machinery has been a benefit to us: it increases the material for our work. If there wasn't so much veneering there wouldn't be so much fancy cabinet-work'⁶⁸. Nevertheless, fancy cabinet-making itself remained a handicraft.

It was the increased production of cabinet small-work from the 1820s, using for the most part 'fancy' wood machine-cut veneers, that brought about the widespread use of the term fancy cabinet-maker. Thomas Pratt of Clerkenwell called himself a fancy cabinet-maker in 1817⁶⁹, but the term did not appear in trade directories until the 1820s⁷⁰. Even then the furniture-makers concerned were included in a list of general cabinet-makers with 'fancy' added in brackets after their name. By 1832, they were listed separately from other cabinet-makers. Robson's London Directory of that year listed twenty-two fancy cabinet-making establishments. Two years earlier the same directory had described three of these as a portable desk-maker, a writing-desk manufacturer and a dressing case-maker respectively, indicating that beneath the umbrella term of fancy cabinet-maker there were different specialisations.

The difficult times experienced by many craftsmen in the 1830s and 40s accelerated the division of labour within fancy cabinet-making. The pressure to produce ever cheaper 'cheap luxuries' led to scamped work and the expansion of fancy cabinet-making took place in the 'dishonourable' sector of furniture-making. Employers in the cheap trade encouraged the division of labour because it kept work people dependent⁷¹. If their 'hand was out' (a trade term for out of practice) then workers were less likely to leave if threatened with wage reductions. After 1830, some fancy cabinet-makers made only one particular item such as work-boxes or desks⁷². The two main sub-divisions by mid-century were dressing case-making and desk-making⁷³. Even within desk-making there was a division of labour with some men working only at portable desk-making⁷⁴ but, because the term 'fancy' so often obscures a precise definition of the type of work undertaken, it is difficult to know how many sub-divisions operated within fancy cabinet-making.

Although most fancy cabinet-work involved veneering, some work was made out of solid wood⁷⁵. The latter, which was always less common, required more skill since veneers could not be used to cover up bad workmanship. The demand for desks and writing-boxes made in solid wood, particularly walnut, increased in the 1840s and there was some specialisation between the two types of work because few fancy cabinet-makers could work as quickly at the one as they could at the other. The employers, however, generally expected a workman to be able to turn his hand to both veneer and solid work as and when it was required⁷⁶.

By mid-century there was another division of labour. The interiors of fancy items such as cases and boxes were fitted up by a separate group of workers, some of whom served seven-year apprenticeships⁷⁷. This task was itself sub-divided. The people who made the interiors of work-boxes were known as pineworkers while those who made the compartments to go inside

dressings-cases were known as fitters-up, even though their work was usually also carried out in pine⁷⁸.

Once the interiors were fitted out with their various partitions and compartments, they had to be lined with coloured papers, silks, satins or velvets⁷⁹. This work was again a distinct sub-division but within it there was also a sexual division-of-labour. Lining was done mostly by women, usually the wives or daughters of fancy cabinet-makers brought up to this type of work. The work was skilful and needed careful training but that part of the work where 'greater care and nicety' was required, for instance the lining of jewel cases which involved the use of velvets, was usually given over to men⁸⁰.

The craft was concentrated in the east and east-central areas of London, with some firms in the north and west. By the mid-nineteenth century, fancy cabinet-making had become so scampish that only two or three per cent of the firms could be described as 'honourable'⁸¹. One of the latter was that run by the 'great' fancy cabinet-maker Henry Middleton, whose firm was situated in Pimlico⁸², while another was the firm of Betjeman which was situated in the less salubrious area of Finsbury⁸³. Fancy cabinet-making, both in the 'honourable' and 'dishonourable' sectors, was quite distinct from general cabinet-making, out of which it emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

inlay, marquetry and buhl work

There has been some debate as to whether there was a specialist group of inlayers working in the seventeenth century but there is little evidence to suggest that such a group was distinct from joiners⁸⁴. In the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, marquetry was executed by cabinet-makers such as Gerrit Jensen, who excelled at such work but, nonetheless, remained cabinet-makers⁸⁵. Between about 1720 and 1760,

marquetry was out of fashion but when it was revived in the 1760s it was again executed by cabinet-makers, the best-known being Pierre Langlois, a French-trained craftsman⁸⁶. In the 1770s, however, a certain quantity of ready-made marquetry panels and medallions which could be set into furniture were available to furniture-makers. Whether or not these marquetry pieces were the work of specialist inlayers or cabinet-makers has been at the centre of a debate which has occupied the attention of furniture historians for over a decade⁸⁷.

It has been shown that Christopher Furlohg, one of the leading makers of these marquetry pieces, was a cabinet-maker who specialised in inlay⁸⁸. He described himself as both cabinet-maker and inlayer, emphasising both his general and his specialised skills⁸⁹. By comparison, his compatriot Johann Christian Linning, referred to himself as an inlayer in the 1770s, suggesting that he earned his living by working at this specialisation⁹⁰. It is unlikely that many others were able to work only at inlaying in the 1770s but, in the 1790s, a few masters are recorded as inlayers in the Inland Revenue apprenticeship records⁹¹. The growth of a new division of labour was halted when marquetry work went out of favour in the early nineteenth century but, when it was revived about 1825, it was established throughout the London furniture trade as a craft separate from cabinet-making⁹².

Those craftsmen who specialised in marquetry in the nineteenth century were known not only as inlayers but also as marquetry-inlayers, cabinet-inlayers and marquetry-workers⁹³. The skill was difficult to acquire: it took at least one year of an apprenticeship before a boy could cut marquetry with any confidence. Once acquired, however, such skills commanded high wages⁹⁴. There were just over 100 British marquetry-workers in London in 1850⁹⁵. They were, however, swamped by the arrival of emigré workers after the European revolutions of 1848. By 1850, foreign craftsmen outnumbered the native marquetry-workers by two to one. Prices fell as the work of the

foreign craftsmen came on to the market and English masters were forced to make dramatic reductions in wages⁹⁶. The craftsmen suffered but it became possible for the first time for less wealthy sections of the population to purchase furniture embellished with marquetry.

Marquetry work was itself divided into three distinct jobs: marquetry cutters, colourers and putters-together⁹⁷. The cutters were the most skilled. The small group who designed their own work needed to be skilled in artistic composition, arranging not only the design but also the various colours used. They worked with fret-saw and frame and often cut with only the eye for guidance. These men were regarded as artists and enjoyed a high status within the hierarchy of furniture-making crafts. The less artistic cutters worked to the designs of others but were still highly skilled craftsmen. The colourer was the worker who stained any wood not suitable in its natural state. This was usually done before the wood was cut but, if done afterwards, required very great care. Shading was probably also done by the colourers. This was achieved by placing the pieces of inlay in a tray of heated sand, with those buried deepest coming out darkest. The putter-together assembled all the pieces, pasted a clean sheet of paper on the side to be displayed and prepared the back for glueing⁹⁸. The marquetry then went to the cabinet-maker who in earlier years had been responsible for this type of work.

Buhl work went out of fashion with marquetry in the early eighteenth century and was not revived until the second decade of the nineteenth century. This led to a new division of labour, with specialist buhl-workers appearing between 1815 and 1820⁹⁹. By the mid-nineteenth century, such workers were divided into two main categories. One group worked at relatively plain brass inlay while the other specialised in the highly decorative 'French ornament' style, often in the 'antique' manner of A. C. Boulle¹⁰⁰. Of this latter group, there were not more than twenty in London who could be

classified as 'good buhl cutters', who could design as well as cut their own patterns and there were none elsewhere in the country. In contrast to this small élite, there were about 100 less skilled workers¹⁰¹. Buhl furniture continued to be produced by these craftsmen until about 1870. In 1876, however, it was noted that, although it was still produced by certain French firms, it was 'no longer a regular trade in this country'¹⁰².

clock-case-making

R. W. Symonds claimed that clock-case-making was a craft distinct from cabinet-making in the eighteenth century¹⁰³ but this has been challenged on the grounds that cabinet-makers in the Lancaster firm of Gillow made clock-cases¹⁰⁴. The evidence concerning London, where the division of labour was more marked than in the provinces¹⁰⁵, however, is more problematic. Trade guides do not discuss clock-case-making nor do they include it in the jobs ascribed to cabinet-makers. There was some specialisation from mid-century: two clock-case-makers were members of the Livery of the Joiners' Company¹⁰⁶. Clock-case-makers are also recorded in the Inland Revenue apprenticeship records from the 1780s but the question of whether London cabinet-makers made clock-cases in the years before about 1788 remains open. It seems unlikely that they did in 1788 because their first piece-rate price book, published in that year, did not include clock-cases¹⁰⁷. Nor did subsequent London books, although certain provincial books did include clock-cases¹⁰⁸.

In the nineteenth century, most clock-case-makers were centred in the clock-making area of Clerkenwell¹⁰⁹, from whence they supplied not only clock-makers but also furniture-makers¹¹⁰. Others were located in the East End and worked in the 'cheap' trade. In the second half of the nineteenth century, those former cabinet-makers who worked at clock-case-making were those who, because of unemployment or other reasons, were unable

to obtain work in the quality trade and worked at making clock-cases in the cheap trade¹¹¹. They were then no longer cabinet-makers but clock-case-makers.

chair-making

Chair-making developed out of joinery in the seventeenth century, just as did cabinet-making. The chair-maker was simply a joiner who specialised in making the frames of chairs and other seat furniture. By 1700, the frames of seat furniture were, by and large, made by specialist chair-makers. The work was amongst the least skilled in furniture-making yet it was considered 'pretty smart' by some¹¹² and Sheraton pointed out that the shaping of chairs required considerable expertise to make them 'agreeable and easy'¹¹³. Once the frame was constructed, the chair went to other craftsmen to be finished. Stuffing and covering was done by upholsterers while carvers and gilders were often involved in the decoration.

Cabinet-makers turned their hand to chair-making in the Lancaster firm of Gillow in the eighteenth century¹¹⁴. It seems unlikely that this was the case in London, however, because the contemporary trade guides which describe furniture-making discussed the two crafts separately¹¹⁵.

Furthermore, the cabinet-makers' 1788 piece-rate book did not include chairs¹¹⁶ and, in 1803, Sheraton emphasised the division of labour between cabinet-making and chair-making in the metropolitan trade which did not exist to the same degree in the provincial trade¹¹⁷. Sheraton added that chair-making and cabinet-making seemed to require different talents in workmen because the jobs were so different¹¹⁸.

If anything, chair-making itself was sub-divided in the metropolitan trade. Although the chair-maker was trained to execute all aspects of the craft and expected to be able to do so by employers, there is some evidence of a division of labour within chair-making. As with the production of tables,

the production of parts for chairs took place on a considerable scale in the second half of the eighteenth century. The 1763 Linnell inventory lists '79 pair of mahogany arms for chairs, 122 pair of mahogany stumps, 200 top ribs D^o, 222 Marlborough feet for tables and chairs D^o, ... 21 pair of OG legs for chairs D^o, 112 bannisters for chair back D^o, ... 60 mahogany splats for chairs ...'¹¹⁹. The large number of parts itemised suggests that certain types of chairs were produced using ready-made components. So great was the emphasis on the all-round craftsman in the quality trade, however, that it is unlikely that any chair-maker, either journeyman or apprentice, was employed regularly and exclusively at making either legs or arms for chairs in the Linnell workshops. Such work probably represented a rational use of time, with craftsmen producing component parts when there were no complete chairs to be made.

The division of labour within chair-making took place largely outside the quality trade. It occurred most particularly in the small East End firms which, after 1820, worked directly for the large retail outlets. Relatively simple jobs such as the making of chair legs were done by unskilled workers and apprentices¹²⁰. The garret-master, who hawked his goods and sold where he could for what he could, also depended on sub-divided labour, usually that of young boys, in order to keep down costs. By the mid-nineteenth century, each separate part of the work, usually done by an all-round craftsman in the quality trade, was done by a different person in the cheap trade. Those who made chair legs made nothing else while those who produced arms for chairs worked only at that sub-division of the craft¹²¹.

cane chair-making

Not only was chair-making a separate craft from joinery in the late seventeenth century, but, before the end of the century, a specialisation

had developed within chair-making itself. Cane chair-making developed as a distinct sub-division in the late seventeenth century when cane chairs, usually with walnut frames, enjoyed a tremendous vogue¹²². So popular were these chairs that, in 1689, upholsterers who feared they would be put out of work petitioned Parliament with the aim of banning the production of such chairs¹²³. They were unsuccessful and the manufacture of cane chairs by specialist craftsmen continued. William Gardner, a chair-maker whose shop on the south side of St. Pauls Cathedral proclaimed his particular interest with its name The Cane Chair, advertised his cane chairs and couches in 1709¹²⁴. In the first quarter of the eighteenth century this specialist craft flourished, particularly in the St. Paul's Churchyard area, but cane chairs went out of fashion in the 1720s and the demand for them was insufficient for craftsmen to support themselves by producing only this type of seat furniture.

chair-caning

The chair-maker did not bottom chairs. Other hands always covered the seats, be it in velvet, wool, leather, rush, cane or any other material. In the late seventeenth century, cane chairs and couches were sold in such numbers that a specialist group of craftsmen worked only at caning the seats. There were 'many apprentices bound only to learn to split the canes, and cane those chairs'¹²⁵. Caning went out of fashion in the 1720s and did not return to popularity until the 1780s, when it accompanied a vogue for light painted or japanned furniture which not only brought work for caners but also ushered in another specialist, the fancy chair-maker.

fancy chair-making

Fancy chairs were a type of light painted or japanned chair, often made in beech or birch, first produced in England in the last quarter of the eighteenth

century. They were extremely popular in London in the 1790s and were probably introduced to the United States of America by fancy chair-makers, such as William Challen, who emigrated from London¹²⁶, as well as through pattern books¹²⁷. The chairs were coloured to harmonise with interior decoration and, because it was not necessary to use mahogany, a lighter framework was obtained. The seats were usually caned, adding to the overall light effect. The backs were decorated, often cut out or painted with flowers or other motifs and the chairs came to be known as 'fancy' chairs because of their decorative nature.

The term was used in 1786 when John Russell, chair-maker to the royal household, supplied '14 fancy back chairs open cutt, shap[ed] feet with cane seats very neatly japanned green and white and drawn into spriggs of flowers'¹²⁸. Two years later, The Cabinet Maker and Upholsterer's Guide commented on the 'new and very elegant fashion' of finishing chairs with 'painted or japanned work, which gives a rich and splendid appearance to the minuter parts of the ornaments'¹²⁹. These chairs were not cheap; many cost more than mahogany ones¹³⁰. Coated with the finest varnish and beautifully painted with arabesques or other motifs, they added lightness, elegance and 'prettiness without gilding' to an interior and decorated the homes of the upper as well as the middle classes¹³¹.

The great demand for 'fancy' chairs in London led to a new division of labour within chair-making. Certain chair-makers specialised in the new type of chair and, from the 1790s, were known as fancy chair-makers, a term which was in common use by the early nineteenth century. In 1797, James Kennett of Lambeth styled himself 'Dy'd, Fancy and Japanned Chair Maker' on his billhead¹³² while he is referred to as a maker of turned chairs in the apprenticeship records of the same year¹³³. When William Osborne of Berwick Street, Soho, apprenticed two boys early in 1802, his craft was given as chair-maker¹³⁴. When he apprenticed a third boy in that year, after he

had moved premises to Wardour Street, Soho, however, he was referred to as a fancy chair-maker¹³⁵. In the following year, a chair-maker from Walcot in Somerset was recorded as a fancy chair-maker¹³⁶, suggesting that this particular division of labour went beyond the fashionable London market.

The extent of the division of labour within chair-making is difficult to estimate. Those chair-makers who worked in the half-dozen or so large manufacturies, noted by Thomas Sheraton in 1803, which produced only painted or japanned chairs, clearly specialised¹³⁹. There is no evidence, however, to suggest that the division of labour extended beyond these fancy chair-making concerns. Chair-makers who worked for comprehensive manufacturing units continued to make all sorts of chairs and light ornamental chairs were included in the piece-rate price lists produced for general chair-making¹³⁸. As the category 'cabinet-maker (fancy)' began to appear in trade directories in the 1820s¹³⁹, however, fancy chairs began to go out of fashion, although they were mentioned by Loudon in the 1830s¹⁴⁰. It was not until the 1860s that the term 'fancy' was again applied to chair-making, when it was given as a sub-heading within the general category of chair-maker in trade directories. The fancy chairs of the 1860s were quite different from those popular in the years 1780 to 1820, however, resembling more closely the inlaid and decorative cabinet work which also took on the name of fancy in the 1860s¹⁴¹. Such chairs appear to have been made by general chair-makers.

bed-joinery and bedstead-making

In the first half of the eighteenth century the craftsmen who made the frames and assembled the various parts for beds were called bed-joiners. This term indicates that the craft was an off-shoot of joinery. In the second half of the century, the term bedstead-maker also came to be used to describe these craftsmen. The bedstead-maker did not represent a new

division of labour; the term was simply used to describe an existing skill. The abandonment of the word joiner may have been an attempt by the craftsmen to make their work appear as respectable as chair-making or cabinet-making, both of which had also developed out of joinery. The substitution of the term bedstead-maker in place of that of bed-joiner was slow. Bedstead-maker was used before the mid-eighteenth century¹⁴² but it was not until the 1780s that it began to be commonly used¹⁴³. Bed-joiner was not greatly used after that date but the term did not finally go out of use until the early nineteenth century¹⁴⁴.

The work was not very skilled and could be quickly learned by an apprentice, provided that he was strong¹⁴⁵. The bedstead-maker was essentially a frame-maker and 'putter-together' of parts made by others¹⁴⁶. Carvers or turners shaped and decorated the pillars and cornices while the hangings were made by upholsterers. In the mid-nineteenth century, the bedstead-maker was even able to obtain the wood for the frame ready-cut to the requisite sizes by the sawyer¹⁴⁷. There was little that could be classed as cabinet-making in the production of most bedsteads, but the 1811 London cabinet-makers' piece-rate book included a few bedsteads¹⁴⁸.

It was not the case that the cabinet-maker made the better quality beds as opposed to the bedstead-maker producing ones of inferior quality because, after the formation of a trade society of bedstead-makers in the 1820s, the bedstead-makers worked to the piece-rate agreements in the 1811 book¹⁴⁹. By the 1820s there was a sufficiently large number of bedstead-makers conscious of a separate identity from cabinet-makers and other furniture-makers to form their own trade society which may even have been in existence in the previous twenty years when such organisations were illegal¹⁵⁰. The quality trade produced the better class of beds but there is no evidence to suggest that, from the 1820s at least, they were made by cabinet-makers rather than bedstead-makers. When Henry Mayhew investigated the quality

furniture trade in 1850, he noted that cabinet-makers did not make bedsteads even though they were part of the regular output of the main firms¹⁵¹.

looking-glass and picture-frame making

Another off-shoot from joinery was frame-making. One Norris or Norrice worked as a frame-maker in Long Acre in the second half of the seventeenth century and, when Samuel Pepys visited his shop in 1669, he was offered 'several forms of frames' to choose from¹⁵². In 1747, Robert Campbell described 'a set of joiners who make nothing but frames for looking-glasses and pictures, and prepare them for the carvers'¹⁵³. The work required little ingenuity or neatness because it mainly consisted of joining roughly-planed deals of the correct size into a frame. Sometimes holes needed to be cut out or mouldings planed in the wood but everything else was left to the carver. Joseph Collyer described the work in almost exactly the same terms in 1761¹⁵⁴. The work of the frame-maker did not change substantially until the demise of the frame-carver in the early nineteenth century¹⁵⁵. After that date, the frame-maker simply assembled the ready-made parts of the frame.

The popularity of ornamental work in the 1820s brought about a great demand for looking-glass and picture-frames, which continued to be made mainly in either artificial materials such as papier mâché or composition or with machine-cut mouldings¹⁵⁶. The severe depression in trade in the 1840s forced certain unemployed cabinet-makers to work at making frames, mostly in mahogany veneered over deal¹⁵⁷, but most frames were made in gilt composition mouldings. These mouldings were gilded before they went to the frame-maker, who cut them to length by hand¹⁵⁸. After the mitred ends were smoothed with a plane, they were fixed together with glue and nails. Once completed, the frame went back to the gilder who then stopped up the nail holes with putty and painted them yellow to camouflage

the signs of construction¹⁵⁹. When handling gilt work the frame-maker needed to work with care but the work required few skills because it consisted of little more than the putting together of parts. There was so little skill in the job that, at the end of the nineteenth century, even the men who made the better class of frames were known as joiners¹⁶⁰.

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C H A P T E R 2

THE FURNITURE-MAKING CRAFTS: 2) THE DECORATIVE AND FINISHING

PROCESSES AND UPHOLSTERY

THE FURNITURE-MAKING CRAFTS: 2) THE DECORATIVE AND FINISHING
PROCESSES AND UPHOLSTERY

The crafts considered in this chapter include those concerned with decorating or adding finishing touches to pieces of furniture, together with the craft of upholstery. Upholstery was the only craft on the 'soft' side of the furniture trade compared with all those described in Chapter 1 which, together with carving and turning, constituted the 'hard' side of the trade. Carving and turning were woodworking crafts but they are discussed in this chapter because they were also decorative processes. Furthermore, carving was closely associated with gilding, one of the main 'finishing' crafts.

gilding

The gilder was a 'finisher of many things', being the last person to work on numerous items of furniture¹. Gilding was 'easy as to the labour required, yet curious in its performance'². There were two methods of gilding. Water gilding, with its highly lustrous finish, was more difficult to execute, less durable and more expensive to produce than oil gilding but both methods required considerable skill³. Water gilding was used mainly on softwood furniture such as pier, picture and mirror-frames, side-tables, chairs, stands and torchères while oil gilding was used mostly on hardwood furniture such as cabinet work and chairs. There was some division of labour based on these two methods. A few gilders, such as William Winter and Dominique Jean, worked as water-gilders⁴ but they were probably the cream of their craft and there is no evidence that the specialisation was anything but a small sub-division. When Sheraton discussed both gilding processes in detail in 1803, he gave no indication of any division of labour within gilding⁵.

The main items gilded were frames. In the second half of the eighteenth century, a few gilders called themselves frame-gilders or even picture-frame-gilders⁶. However, this probably reflected the fact that frame-gilding dominated the work of such gilders rather than formed the whole of it. The popularity of frames made from artificial materials or machine-cut mouldings in the second quarter of the nineteenth century ensured that frame-gilding continued to form the main part of the gilder's work⁷. In the second half of the nineteenth century, gilders were normally known as picture-frame-gilders even though individual craftsmen also gilded items such as cornices and brackets⁸.

In the years after 1850, the gilding done in the cheaper end of the trade, particularly on frames, was often crudely done, and youths were employed as assistants or preparers rather than trained as apprentices⁹. Indeed, by the end of the century, it was claimed that it was only because of the historic association of the gilder with the carver in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that the gilder was classified as a furniture maker¹⁰.

carving and gilding

Since a great deal of carved furniture was also gilt, there was a close connection between the two crafts of carving and gilding. The two crafts were quite distinct but in the eighteenth century craft demarcations, which in other branches of furniture-making remained fairly rigid, were sometimes ignored and apprentices were taught both of these related crafts. At the same time, however, both carving and gilding were taught as separate crafts.

One reason for the amalgamation of the two crafts was the fluctuating demand for carving and gilding, both of which were more seriously affected by changes in fashion than were cabinet-making, upholstery or chair-making. Significant changes in taste meant that these last-mentioned

craftsmen might have to work in new styles and use new materials and techniques but there remained a demand for their general category of work. Clients still wanted cabinets, bookcases, tables, chairs and window curtains. A change in taste away from either carving or gilding, however, meant that those particular craftsmen were threatened with unemployment or under-employment. When Robert Campbell discussed the crafts of carving and gilding in 1747, he took great care to discuss them separately but he also commented that gilders also worked as carvers at a time when there was little work available for gilders who did not have some knowledge of carving¹¹. Furthermore, a working knowledge of both crafts was a useful basis upon which to build either a firm which concentrated on carving and gilding or a comprehensive manufacturing firm.

The popularity of both carving and gilding from mid-century until the 1780s meant that there was sufficient demand to maintain a separation of the two crafts. In the quality trade, the specialist artistic carvers and specialist water-gilders were undoubtedly the *élite* of each craft but there was a not inconsiderable status attached to the joint skill of carving and gilding. In the 1760s, for instance, the average apprenticeship premium asked by master carver and gilders was higher than that asked by specialist carvers¹². As carving came under increasing threat from new artificial materials, particularly after 1780¹³, many parents must have regarded a training in both crafts as an insurance policy against an uncertain future. The intimate connection of the two skills, which were not only frequently associated in business but also, on occasions, jointly taught to apprentices, was reflected in the continuation of the term 'carver and gilder' in later years when the craft of frame-carving was virtually extinct. It was stated in 1813 that most of those who called themselves carver and gilder had never seen a carving tool in their lives¹⁴. They were simply gilders. The situation had not

changed by 1870: the person who produced picture and looking-glass frames usually referred to himself as a 'carver and gilder' even though the work consisted of nothing more than gilding and the putting together of frames¹⁵.

carving

For the first sixty years of the eighteenth century there were two distinct groups of carvers - the chair-carvers and the frame-carvers. The latter were carvers who specialised in mirror and looking-glass frames, pier-tables and stands, made mainly in softwoods such as limewood, pearwood or beech¹⁶. They needed to be able to draw and design¹⁷ and were the most artistic and skilled of all the furniture-makers in the years 1700 to 1870. These carvers were regarded as sculptors in wood¹⁸ and it was claimed, in 1761, that the craft had been 'lately carried to great perfection'¹⁹. By the early nineteenth century, however, this artistic craft was virtually extinct, so great was the competition from moulded composition ornament and machine-cut mouldings, and it was not revived despite a renewed interest in wood carving in the second quarter of the nineteenth century²⁰.

The chair-carvers were 'a species of carvers, peculiar to themselves; who are employed in carving chairs, posts and testers of beds, or any other furniture whereon carving is used'²¹. Although such carvers were known as chair-carvers, their work included a wide range of furniture - everything which passed through a furniture-maker's shop apart from that made by the frame-carvers²².

The only sub-division within this craft came in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. The demand for cane chairs was so great that some carvers trained apprentices in the 'carving of cane chair stools, couches and squabs only'²³. Such craftsmen were known as cane-chair-carvers but the demand for their work did not last long into the eighteenth century. There was never again a sufficient demand for one type

of work to sustain a sub-division of the craft comparable with the cane-chair-carvers.

Apprentice chair-carvers were expected to have 'a taste for drawing, and some skill in the practice of it'²⁴. The combination of rococo design and the use of the close and hard-grained mahogany in the 1750s led to the popularity of elaborately carved chairs and a great demand for hardwood carvers²⁵. Seat furniture dominated the work of the chair-carvers. Its production in suites of eight, twelve or more pieces probably encouraged specialisation in that one carver might work on a complete suite in order to achieve a uniformity of carving. The only known division of labour, however, was that whereby the carving of chair backs was done by a particularly skillful carver. The firm of Cobb, for instance, put out to Sefferin Alken, an independent master carver, the carving of the chair backs on a set of eight mahogany chairs supplied to the Earl of Coventry in 1764²⁶. Employees of the firm carved the arms and front feet²⁷. Such a division of labour probably happened only on pieces of very high quality.

The demand for hardwood carving diminished in the 1760s with the introduction of the neo-classical style in interior decoration which favoured a lightness in design. Furthermore, the cost of mahogany rose in the late 1770s and 80s and this also encouraged the use of softwoods²⁸. Hardwood carving was increasingly replaced by painted or turned decoration and, in 1803, Sheraton commented that most of the carved decoration on chairs was on gilt or painted chairs and consisted mainly of flat strap work and scrolls²⁹.

There were only about thirteen master carvers and sixty to seventy journeymen carvers in London by the second decade of the nineteenth century³⁰. By the 1820s, it was recognised that wood carving was virtually an obsolete craft in the capital³¹. The re-decoration and

re-furnishing of Windsor Castle for George IV in the 1820s was one of the last large-scale undertakings which gave employment to softwood carvers³². When wood carving was revived in the 1830s, however, only hardwood carving was revived. Although some softwood carving was done, it was mainly for demonstration and exhibition purposes and the craft was not re-established within the furniture trade. In 1850, softwood carving was pronounced extinct: it had been 'entirely superseded by the use of composition ornaments and machine-cut mouldings'³³.

The renewed interest in carving was a result of a growing interest in sculpture³⁴ and the Gothic Revival movement in architecture and design³⁵. There was a great demand for carvers in the capital for large jobs such as the decoration and furnishing of the New Palace of Westminster³⁶ and also within furniture-making firms. Between 1830 and 1850, the number of wood carvers working in London rose dramatically³⁷. There were two main groups of carvers, the chair-carvers and the cabinet-carvers³⁸. From about 1840, there was a small sub-division, with certain craftsmen working only at the carving of bed pillars³⁹, but, by and large, carvers within furniture-making worked either as cabinet- or chair-carvers. Until the early nineteenth century, the chair-carver had decorated both seat and cabinet furniture but from the 1830s chair-carving and cabinet-carving were distinct crafts. Cabinet-carving dominated the furniture trade and was the most skilled branch. There was, however, some movement of personnel from one craft to the other⁴⁰. A cabinet-carver could fairly readily turn his hand to chair-carving but the chair-carver who wished to work in the other branch of carving needed to master the more elaborate type of work undertaken by cabinet-carvers.

The cabinet-carver came to prominence in the second quarter of the nineteenth century⁴¹. Although they worked mainly at ornamenting cabinet furniture, cabinet-carvers also worked on frames as and when

required by their employers⁴². These carvers specialised not only in domestic items such as cabinets, bookcases, and sideboards, but also ecclesiastical furnishings, often executed in an elaborate and naturalistic manner. The variations in style demanded of them were considerable. They not only had to adapt to the changes from 'Gothic' to 'Norman Gothic' and 'Early English' but also to other decorative styles including 'Italian', 'Renaissance' and 'Elizabethan'⁴³.

The craft did not divide on broad stylistic lines or between the ecclesiastical work, done mainly in oak, and domestic furniture, much of which was executed in mahogany. Wood carvers were generally expected to turn their hand to any type of furniture, style or wood. The workmen who made pulpits and fonts also made sideboards and bookcases. Some degree of specialisation crept in, however, amongst the most skilled workers. The carving of figures, flowers, fruit and foliage was the 'high-art' of domestic cabinet carving but the carving of gothic animal grotesques proved the most difficult. If one man proved exceptionally good at a particular job, say the carving of foliage, he tended to be employed more frequently at that task than at others⁴⁴. This division of labour was partly a result of the recruitment of carvers from outside London, many of whom hailed from old cathedral towns such as Norwich and Lincoln⁴⁵. By mid-century there was a partial, but by no means complete, separation between the carvers who excelled at 'Gothic' work and those whose abilities lay in executing non-gothic naturalistic forms⁴⁶.

The degree of specialisation involved in furniture carving of the very best quality is illustrated by the Louis XVI cabinet made by Jackson and Graham and shown at the Paris Exhibition of 1855. Acclaimed, quite ludicrously, as the 'first really noble piece of cabinet maker's work ... which has been executed in this country', it nevertheless achieved a very high standard of craftsmanship⁴⁷. The caryatids, figures and flowers were

each carved by different craftsmen and a foreign carver, Claudio Colombo, was brought in to execute the carved figures on this fine cabinet⁴⁸. Few foreign craftsmen worked at wood carving in London, unlike the other decorative crafts of marquetry and buhl work⁴⁹, and all the other carvers who worked on this cabinet appear to have been British-born⁵⁰. This cabinet was exceptional, however, in that it was made for exhibition purposes and such an intense division of labour applied only to work of the very finest order. As stated earlier, even in the better quality trade work was not usually so minutely divided.

Carving came to dominate the design of much cabinet furniture, so much so that one critic complained that cabinets were too often 'a museum of natural curiosities in themselves' and displayed nothing but the skills of the carver⁵¹. The popularity of such work, however, kept about 200-300 wood carvers employed in the quality trade in 1850⁵². Of those, about seventy were considered as artists in their own way⁵³. They formed their own society aimed at self-improvement, and their rooms, which housed a valuable collection of casts, models, prints, drawings and books, were described as a 'museum'⁵⁴. By contrast, there were between 250 and 300 less skilled carvers working mainly in Moorfields, Bethnal Green and the area around Curtain Road⁵⁵. Although wood carving enjoyed the greatest status of any woodworking or decorative furniture-making craft, there was a hierarchy of skills within its own ranks.

turning

Some turners produced the very cheapest type of wooden seat furniture used in servants' rooms or kitchens⁵⁶ but for about the first seventy years of the eighteenth century, few turners found work in furniture-making. It was not until the neo-classical style was established that turned work returned to favour in furniture. From the 1770s, the turner supplied the cabinet-

maker, the chair-maker and the bedstead-maker with parts for furniture.

The fashion for 'fancy' chairs in the 1780s and 90s also increased the demand for turned work⁵⁷. Not all fancy chairs had turned legs but many of them did: imitation bamboo, for instance, was simulated by painting turned wood⁵⁸ and James Kennett, a fancy chair-maker, was also referred to as a turned chair-maker⁵⁹. The revival of interest in styles and techniques of earlier periods in the early nineteenth century led to a widespread interest in turning⁶⁰. The craft flourished in the London furniture trade, particularly after 1825 when steam-powered lathes were introduced⁶¹. Steam-powered tools made the work less laborious and doubled productivity without eliminating the handicraft skill of the turner⁶².

This technological development did not produce a new division of labour. The turner continued to supply a wide range of goods to furniture-makers and, in the 1830s, added accessories such as door and drawer knobs and curtain poles and rings⁶³. Such division of labour as there was resulted from the situation in which the turner worked. If he worked for a furniture-maker or a middleman who supplied furniture shops, he was expected to be an all-round craftsman, a 'general' turner. This was the most skilled section of turning because a wide variety of work had to be executed from drawings and done to a 'great nicety, especially in new patterns for bed-pillars and table-legs'⁶⁴. If, on the other hand, the turner worked for a chair-maker, then the only work required was the largely repetitive job of turning parts, mostly legs, for seat furniture⁶⁵. These were the two main divisions within furniture-making in the years up to 1870.

There was one further sub-division quite separate from these two main sections. A small group of turners produced wooden tassels and fringes used by upholsterers on bed and window hangings in the mid-nineteenth

century⁶⁶. The specialisation was a response to a particular fashion: because it involved small and intricate items which were made in unusual softwoods such as lime, chestnut and alder, it was not done by turners in either of the two main sections of the trade⁶⁷. Furniture-makers probably bought in such items as and when they needed them in the same way as they purchased metal handles, locks and other small items.

japanning

Japanning, or the art of applying a lacquer-like finish to furniture, was a distinct craft and lay outside furniture-making proper. Oriental lacquer work was popular in England after the Restoration and japanning was developed to imitate this. Duties on imported lacquer were increased in 1701 and this ensured that the English japanner suffered little competition from abroad⁶⁸. The work was skilled. Apprentices needed to be able to paint and draw 'to great perfection' and they were taught to decorate woodwork, particularly cabinet ware, and also metalwork⁶⁹. As a decorative technique, japanning was popular for most of the first half of the eighteenth century: the 'most eminent japanner in England', Abraham Massey of Great Queen Street, London, died in 1746 just as its popularity waned⁷⁰.

However, it never fell entirely out of use. The firm of Linnell, for instance, continued to sell japanned furniture in the 1760s⁷¹. As demand fell, many japanners must have had difficulty in finding work until the revival of interest in japanning in the 1780s, with the vogue for light painted furniture. The Cabinet Maker and Upholsterer's Guide of 1788 commented on the fashion for japanned and painted work⁷², but the japanned work done at that time was often indistinguishable from painted wood finished with varnish⁷³.

furniture painting

The crafts of japanning and furniture painting were closely associated.

Dossie's The Handmaid to the Arts of 1758 described japanning as 'covering bodies by ground of opaque colours in varnish; which may be either afterwards decorated by painting or gilding, or left in a plain state...' ⁷⁴, and Sheraton, in 1803, described painted furniture as japanned furniture ornamented with painted decoration ⁷⁵. To Sheraton the end product was the same, be it painted or japanned furniture. He did, however, recognise that the two crafts were quite separate. The japanner painted the ground colours and varnished the furniture while the furniture painter added the artistic decoration ⁷⁶.

The painting of decoration onto a japanned background, which was then varnished over, required considerable skill. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, it was often used in imitation of inlaid flowers and medallions and was used on cabinets and commodes ⁷⁷ as well as 'fancy' chairs and cornices ⁷⁸. At that time, there were no craftsmen furniture-makers who could readily turn their hand to painting furniture, especially the more elaborate floral wreaths and landscapes. Certain crafts, such as carving and japanning, however, demanded more artistic talents and training than others, and it was probably to the artistically-inclined in the furniture trade that Sheraton addressed the technical detail about painted decoration in his Dictionary of 1803 ⁷⁹. He considered that craftsmen without any previous tuition or practice in ornamental design should do no more than paint simple lines. Firms such as Gillow employed minor artists to paint furniture but this was probably for the better quality items ⁸⁰. Seddon employed the distinguished artist William Hamilton to decorate medallions on a cabinet designed by the famous architect William Chambers and made for Charles IV of Spain in 1793 ⁸¹. This cabinet was one of the firm's prestige pieces and, at that date, Seddon possibly

also used the services of a furniture painter as it did in the early years of the nineteenth century⁸².

french polishing

Before the introduction of french polish in the early nineteenth century, woodworking furniture-makers polished their own furniture using materials such as bees-wax and turpentine or linseed oil and brick-dust⁸³. All of the methods used were laborious. French polish, a shellac and spirit-based polish, however, was not only less laborious to apply but it also greatly enhanced the colour of the wood and gave a smooth and glass-like finish⁸⁴.

The new method is generally accepted to have been introduced to England from France after the peace of 1814 but an authority on the subject, writing at the end of the nineteenth century, stated that french polishers worked in the East End as early as 1808⁸⁵. At any rate, the new method was in use in the second decade of the nineteenth century. The French practitioners of this new method of polishing settled amongst the Spitalfields weavers but found work in both the West and East End of London⁸⁶. They worked at all levels in the trade, from the best quality shops to the smallest sweat shop. In France, polishing had not constituted a separate division of labour within furniture-making but it was immediately established as a distinct and separate occupation in London, even in the smallest shop, and so it remained⁸⁷.

upholstery

The term upholder and upholsterer were both used in the eighteenth century to describe the main craftsman on the 'soft' side of the trade. Upholsterer was used occasionally in the first half of the eighteenth century but it did not come into common use until after 1750, when it replaced the more archaic term of upholder⁸⁸. Upholstery was highly regarded within furniture-making and apprenticeship fees were amongst the highest in the furniture trade⁸⁹.

The work was not as artistic as carving, which brought some of its exponents higher wages than upholsterers, but great care was needed when working with expensive materials which had to be cut and sewn according to complicated patterns. The work was not laborious and working conditions were cleaner and more congenial than in woodworking shops. Upholsterers could go to work dressed in better clothes than could woodworkers and were required to look smart when working at the homes of 'nice ladies' and other customers⁹⁰. In short, upholstery was regarded as a clean, genteel and respectable occupation which particularly suited young men 'who have no strength to spare'⁹¹.

In the eighteenth century it was the job of the upholsterer to 'fit up beds, window curtains, hangings, and to cover chairs that have stuffed bottoms'⁹² and the craft remained similarly defined in 1850⁹³. The job fell into two parts. The first was the stuffing and covering of seat furniture which was 'the nicest part of this branch'⁹⁴. This was the exclusive domain of the male worker. The cutting and nailing on of expensive materials as well as the stuffing was given only to men with a thorough craft training⁹⁵. The second part of the work was the cutting and sewing of bed furniture, window curtains, cases and other items. This work necessitated a person who, according to Robert Campbell writing in 1747, could 'handle the needle so alertly as to sew a plain seam, and sew on lace without puckers, and he must use his sheers so dextrously as to cut a valence or counterpane with a genteel sweep, according to pattern he has before him'⁹⁶.

Campbell went on to state that 'all this part of the work is performed by women, who never served an apprenticeship to the mystery, as well as men'⁹⁷, but it is difficult to know whether he was referring to both cutting and sewing or just sewing. There is no evidence to substantiate a claim that women worked at cutting out. A General Description of All Trades,

published in the same year as Campbell's trade guide, simply stated that women were employed by upholsterers to do some of the needlework⁹⁸. Cutting remained a male-dominated job throughout the nineteenth century⁹⁹ and, therefore, it is unlikely that when Campbell referred to 'all this part' of upholstery work he included cutting. The only part of cutting done by women when Henry Mayhew reported on their working conditions in 1849 was the cutting out of the cheaper chintz or holland cases for seat furniture, cases which protected furniture stuffed and covered by male workers¹⁰⁰. With sewing it was different. Women who had not had the benefit of a craft training undertook sewing together with craft-trained men¹⁰¹. They made up curtains, cases and bed furniture and also sewed together carpet pieces. Although these female workers were classified as unskilled because they had not undergone a formal apprenticeship, sewing was traditionally taught to young girls in the home and many achieved high levels of expertise.

Upholstery women were largely ignored in trade guides and other literature which discussed furniture-making. Even when Henry Mayhew studied the position of these women it was not as part of his study of London furniture-makers but rather as part of his study of the incomes and working conditions of needlewomen in the capital. He commented that most of the females employed in upholstery were middle-aged. Many were widows, often of upholsterers, but the majority were spinsters: one upholsteress stated that 'there are more old maids employed in the upholstery business than any other'¹⁰². The women were sober and steady as befitted a job requiring 'great care and nicety'¹⁰³. A respectable appearance was required when upholstery was undertaken at a client's home, whether the task involved sewing or more menial work such as assisting male upholsterers with the hanging of window curtains and bed furniture or fitting carpets.

The stuffing and covering of chairs was done by the male upholsterer in the eighteenth century but, in the last decade of that

century, a new division of labour began to emerge. John Allen of Shoreditch was recorded as a chair-stuffer in 1791¹⁰⁴, indicating that there was some separation between stuffing and covering. The sub-division of chair-stuffing grew most rapidly in the cheap upholstery trade which expanded with the demand for amply upholstered furniture in the 1820s and 30s. In the East End, men and women worked as chair-stuffers in the mid-nineteenth century¹⁰⁵ and boys were trained at stuffing only¹⁰⁶.

The deep buttoning of seat furniture that developed in the 1850s was at first the work of a distinct group of specialists. A group of 'Germans from Vienna' settled in England about 1851-3 and established themselves as a separate group within upholstery, not because of a division of labour within the existing craft of upholstery, but rather because they possessed skills unknown to the native upholsterers¹⁰⁷. Springs were used to stuff the seats and they used 'that pretty tufted work where there is a rise in the material', to cover them¹⁰⁸. These foreign upholsterers worked at both stuffing and covering but were gradually assimilated into the upholstery trade after their secrets were discovered¹⁰⁹.

It is difficult to estimate the extent to which there was a division of labour in the West End upholstery trade. A degree of sub-division is indicated in the mid-nineteenth century when Heal and Son of Tottenham Court Road advertised for a cutter-out who was used to 'good West End trade'¹¹⁰. According to evidence given to the Royal Commission on the Sweated Trades in 1888, however, the division of labour was not widespread in the quality trade until the late 1870s¹¹¹. Until that date, the upholsterers' trade society, which represented the men who worked in the best shops in the capital, insisted that all its members were 'superior' all-round craftsmen¹¹². After that date, however, even this society of élite craftsmen was forced to recognise the extent of the division of labour

within the craft, which was split into three main branches of stuffing, covering and the cutting-out of loose cases¹¹³.

The various furniture-making crafts enjoyed differing degrees of status but all were necessary in the production of furniture. The main furniture-making crafts were established by 1700 but some sub-division occurred in all the crafts. In the West End trade, specialisation generally resulted in increased craft skills, with workers separating off from the main craft in order to concentrate on a new or popular type of work such as when specialist marquetry-workers developed out of cabinet-making. In the cheaper trade, by contrast, sub-division resulted from the drive to produce good as cheaply as possible. Crafts were broken down into particular jobs and each separated one from another. This led to a dilution of craft skills as workers were trained in and engaged at small repetitive tasks.

Craft demarcations were fairly rigid and were enforced by the craftsmen's pride in their own craft¹¹⁴ as well as through their collective organisations, the guilds and trade societies¹¹⁵. The separation of the crafts is a theme commented upon in eighteenth century trade guides and confirmed by Henry Mayhew in 1850¹¹⁶. Gilders did not work as cabinet-makers nor did cabinet-makers work at upholstery or carving. In the quality trade in London, the only crafts which merged were carving and gilding and these were jointly taught to apprentices in the manner of a new single craft.

The crafts each had their own skills and separate identity. They each played a part in the production of furniture. Several of the crafts were brought together by entrepreneurs who organised production so that a wide range of items were completed within a single firm. The ways in which they were brought together is the main concern of Chapter 4.

- 1 Anon., A General Description of All Trades, 1747, p. 102
- 2 ibid., p. 102
- 3 J. Stalker and G. Parker, A Treatise of Japanning and Varnishing, 1688, pp. 53-4 and Thomas Sheraton, The Cabinet Dictionary, 1803, p. 227
- 4 PRO IR 1/17 and 27 resp.
- 5 Sheraton, Dictionary, pp. 222-232
- 6 William Watts, St. Ann's Westminster, was recorded as a picture-frame-gilder in 1763. PRO IR 1/24
- 7 see pp. 207-8 + 224
- 8 Charles Tomlinson, Illustrations of Trades, 1867, p. 52 and The Art Journal, Illustrated Catalogue of the International Exhibition, 1862, 1862, p. 50
- 9 Alfred Bird, aged 18 in 1851, of St. James's worked as a gilder's preparer, possibly for his brother Edward, aged 28 in 1851, who was a 'gilder of picture-frames, etc.'. PRO HD 107 1851 1539.4.1
- 10 Ernest Aves, 'The Furniture Trade', in Charles Booth, ed. Life and Labour of the People in London, vol IV, The Trades of East London, 1893, p. 192
- 11 R. Campbell, London Tradesmen, 1747, p. 108
- 12 see Appendix I, Table 6
- 13 see p. 224
- 14 Thomas Martin, The Circle of the Mechanical Arts, 1813, p. 159
- 15 Tomlinson, Illustrations of Trades, p. 52
- 16 Campbell, London Tradesmen, p. 174
- 17 ibid., p. 175
- 18 ibid., p. 107
- 19 Joseph Collyer, The Parent's and Guardian's Directory, 1761, p. 150
- 20 see pp. 207-8, 211 + 224
- 21 Campbell, London Tradesmen, p. 172
- 22 Collyer, Directory, p. 95
- 23 R. W. Symonds, 'English Cane Chairs: The Rise and Decline of an Industry Between 1660 and 1747', Antique Collector, May 1937, p. 105

- 24 Collyer, Directory, p. 95 and Campbell, London Tradesmen, p. 172
- 25 Campbell, op. cit., p. 172
- 26 Anthony Coleridge, Chippendale Furniture, 1968, p. 33
- 27 ibid, p. 33
- 28 I am grateful to Dr. L.O.J. Boynton for this information
- 29 Sheraton, Dictionary, p. 136
- 30 Martin, Mechanical Arts, 1813, p. 159 and Journal of Design, vol. **iv**, Sep 1850-Feb 1851, pp. 139+ 141
- 31 E. Hardcastle, Wine and Walnuts; or, After Dinner 'Chit-Chat', 1823, vol. 1, p. 177
- 32 Henry Mayhew, 'Of The Fancy Cabinet-Makers Of London', Letter LXIV, Morning Chronicle, 8 Aug 1850 and Geoffrey de Bellaigue and Pat Kirkham, 'George IV And The Furnishing of Windsor Castle', Furniture History, vol. VIII, 1972, pp. 1-34
- 33 ibid
- 34 Elizabeth Aslin, Nineteenth Century English Furniture, 1962, p. 50
- 35 see J. Mordaunt Crook, introduction to Charles L. Eastlake, History of The Gothic Revival, 1970, and Sir Kenneth Clark, The Gothic Revival, an Essay in the History of Taste, 1964 ed.
- 36 Morning Chronicle, 8 Aug 1850
- 37 ibid.
- 38 ibid.
- 39 POD 1845 lists eight firms as bed pillar carvers. In 1851, Charles Webster gave his occupation as bed pillar manufacturer. He probably supplied plain pillars to carvers. PRO HO 1851, 1533.1.5
- 40 Morning Chronicle, 8 Aug 1850
- 41 Richard Moore, Chartist and friend of William Lovett, worked as a cabinet-carver in 1834, which suggests that he was probably apprenticed by 1827 at the latest. William Lovett, Life and Struggles of William Lovett In his Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge and Freedom, 1967 ed., p. 72. see also trade directories 1830-50
- 42 Morning Chronicle, 8 Aug 1850
- 43 ibid.
- 44 ibid.
- 45 ibid.

- 46 ibid.
- 47 M. D. Wyatt, 'On Furniture and Decoration', Reports On The Paris Universal Exhibition, 1856, Part 1, p. 306
- 48 ibid., p. 306
- 49 Morning Chronicle, 8 Aug 1850, see also p. 32
- 50 Richard Moore (see note 41) was one of them.
- 51 Richard Redgrave, Design as applied to Manufactures, 1857, p. 31
- 52 Journal of Design, vol. IV, 1850-51, p. 39 stated that there were about 200 wood carvers in London while Henry Mayhew stated that there were between 250 and 300 better class carvers in London in 1850. Morning Chronicle, 8 Aug 1850
- 53 Journal of Design, vol. IV, 1850-51, p. 139
- 54 Henry Mayhew, 'Of The Slop Cabinet Trade', Letter LXV, Morning Chronicle, 15 Aug 1850 and Journal of Design, vol. IV, 1850-1, p. 60 (the latter is based on information in the former).
- 55 Morning Chronicle, 8 Aug 1850
- 56 A General Description of All Trades, p. 57
- 57 see p. 38
- 58 John Gloag, A Short Dictionary of Furniture, rev.ed. 1969, p. 625 and Gillian Walkling, Antique Bamboo Furniture, 1979, pp.36-42
- 59 PRO IR 1/37
- 60 Henry Mayhew, 'Of The Turners Of London', Letter LXVII, Morning Chronicle, 29 Aug 1850
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- 62 ibid.
- 63 ibid.
- 64 ibid.
- 65 ibid.
- 66 ibid.
- 67 ibid.
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- 89 see p. 81
- 90 A General Description of All Trades, pp. 214-5
- 91 ibid., p. 215
- 92 Campbell, London Tradesmen, pp. 169-70

- 93 Morning Chronicle, 1 Aug 1850
- 94 Campbell, op. cit., p. 170
- 95 ibid., p. 170
- 96 ibid., p. 170
- 97 ibid., p. 170
- 98 A General Description of All Trades, p. 215
- 99 Aves, 'The Furniture Trade', p. 206
- 100 Henry Mayhew, Letter IX, Morning Chronicle, 16 Nov 1849
- 101 A General Description of All Trades, p. 215 and Campbell, London Tradesmen, p. 170
- 102 Morning Chronicle, 16 Nov 1849
- 103 ibid.
- 104 PRO IR 1/34
- 105 PP. 1888, (13), vol. XX, Sweating System, p. 679, PP. 1890 (5), vol. XVIII, Sweating System, p. 280 and PRO HO 107 1851 passim.
- 106 PP. 1888, Sweating System, p. 679 and PP. 1890, Sweating System, p. 280
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CHAPTER 3

THE CRAFT TRAINING: APPRENTICESHIP

THE CRAFT TRAINING: APPRENTICESHIP

Apprenticeship was a basic feature of the handicraft system. It controlled entry into the craft, maintained standards of workmanship and was the means by which a skill or 'mystery' was handed down from generation to generation. The traditional apprenticeship involved a youth, usually aged about fourteen, who was trained to a particular skill by a master craftsman for a period of seven years. This system was protected by the Statute of Artificers of 1563 but this protective legislation did not prevent a gradual and piece-meal decline in the apprenticeship system in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as entrepreneurs found the regulations too restrictive¹. The apprenticeship system disintegrated rapidly in the late eighteenth century, culminating in the repeal of the legislation in 1814². The dismantling of the protective legislation took place against the wishes of the London journeymen who campaigned for its retention in the hope of protection against unskilled and cheap labour. In the West End, journeymen furniture-makers managed to retain some form of apprenticeship but elsewhere in the trade the system eroded rapidly. There, by the mid-nineteenth century, the complex and many-faceted relationship between apprentice and master was largely reduced to a simple cash-nexus, with the apprentice little more than a low-paid worker.

The Elizabethan Statute of Artificers did not formally apply to crafts such as cabinet-making, which developed after that date⁴, but nevertheless in London cabinet-makers were trained in a similar manner to other furniture-making craftsmen. Throughout the eighteenth century, most apprentices bound to London furniture-makers received a traditional craft training for which their parents or guardian paid to the master a fee. These apprenticeship premiums, or considerations as they were often called, reflected the status of both the craft and the individual master and, in

certain cases, the promise of a training that went beyond craft matters⁵. Premiums were waived in special circumstances, as in the case of a close relative, friend or neighbour: when, for instance, Paul Saunders, upholsterer, bound his son Hugh in 1767 he stated that the only consideration was 'love and affection'⁶.

The sum agreed, both master and apprentice signed indentures, which set out the requirements demanded of each of them⁷. The master undertook to teach the boy every aspect of his craft and the boy agreed to work at his tasks diligently. The master provided lodgings, food, drink and clothing⁸ and, in return, the boy agreed to certain restrictions on his social life. Marriage was forbidden, as was fornication. The equally attractive sin of gambling was also denied the apprentice, together with cards, dice and unlawful games. The joys of the playhouse and the tavern were also signed away. By observing such regulations and the clauses concerning obedience and good behaviour, it was hoped that the apprentice would learn his craft well and not waste his master's time, money or materials.

The master stood in loco parentis and was expected to ensure that the apprentice did not fall into wicked ways. It was a great advantage for a boy to be taken into a kind and friendly household. The kindness shown to an apprentice by the wife of John Linnell was acknowledged by the boy's mother⁹ but the many kindnesses of other masters and their families went largely unrecorded. At best, the relationship between master and boy was like that of father and son. It was not unknown for former apprentices to marry the master's daughter in the manner of Hogarth's Industrious Apprentice, as did William Linnell's former apprentice, William Bond¹⁰, or even the master's widow¹¹. Timothy Cooper married the daughter-in-law of his former master, James Whittle, after the death of Whittle's son¹². Such marriages were respectable but a great fear amongst the parents of apprentices was that their sons would marry the servant girl rather than the mistress or daughter

of the household or marry before the end of their apprenticeship¹³.

Not all relationships between master and apprentice were satisfactory. Indeed, the scope of responsibilities undertaken by both parties to the apprenticeship indentures was so broad as to give plenty of room for complaint on both sides. John Fielding, whose experience as a magistrate led him to establish a counselling service for prospective apprentices and their guardians in 1759, considered that most problems arose from youths disliking the occupations to which they were bound, to bad examples set by families with whom they lived and to masters taking apprentices for the sake of the fees¹⁴. Besides this, problems arose from masters trying to impose restrictions on the social life of adolescent youths in a 'dangerous season of life'¹⁵. London offered many temptations and metropolitan apprentices were traditionally unruly¹⁶.

Many of the complaints made about the treatment of apprentices by masters and their wives were relatively minor. The same mother who praised Mrs. Linnell, for instance, was equally ready to complain that when Mrs. Tatham was in charge of the same household she bought the boy the wrong type of stockings. The letter written by this mother to John Linnell in 1792 illustrates the type of trivial matters with which parents expected a master to concern himself¹⁷. The boy's winter colds, his lack of suitable clothing and the washing of those clothes he did have were all brought to the attention of Linnell, a leading entrepreneur furniture-maker and designer. Other complaints were more serious and those brought before the Chamberlain of the City of London, the traditional protector of apprentices, show how far the relationship between master and apprentice could deteriorate. Before complaints were formally lodged, there was usually a history of tension and conflict and more than one matter was often raised before the Chamberlain. One complaint made by apprentice furniture-makers was that they were not taught their craft in all its aspects, if at all, as promised in their

indentures¹⁸. This was sometimes because the master was in financial difficulties and put them to work at tasks outside the craft to which they had been bound. In 1742, for instance, two apprentices bound to John Wierne complained that they had not been taught cabinet-making, to which they had been apprenticed, because their master had virtually no cabinet work on hand. They were put to making picture-frames, which they considered not 'so good or beneficial' as cabinet-making. The two youths were finally discharged from their apprenticeships only when Wierne became so short of cash that he could not buy wood to continue any type of work¹⁹. In 1789, an apprentice carver and gilder complained that he was employed as an errand boy and not taught his craft²⁰ and, in the following year, Thomas Grace, who had served eighteen months of his apprenticeship to Daniel Lock, carver and gilder, complained that he was not taught carving as well as gilding²¹. Grace, however, had quarrelled with his master after returning home one night at a quarter-past-ten and been refused supper. This and other grievances, such as being given mouldy bread, appear to have precipitated Grace's formal complaint against his master²².

Other complaints frequently made by apprentice furniture-makers included masters getting into debt and neglecting their business or absconding²³. Complaints of unnecessarily harsh beatings and other physical ill-treatment were also frequent. One apprentice, for instance, was repeatedly cruelly beaten and forced to sleep in a coal-hole²⁴. Some masters whose works are greatly admired today were hard task-masters in the workshops. In 1726, Giles Grendey was accused of barbarous treatment of an apprentice²⁵ and, in 1756, Edward Edwards left Hallett's firm because of harsh treatment²⁶. Although physical violence usually came from the master, the apprentice occasionally took his revenge. Joseph Clarke, an apprentice carver and gilder, for instance, hit his master over the eye with a poker, for which he was committed to Bridewell, a House of Correction²⁷, for one

month²⁸.

Complaints made by masters were undoubtedly treated more seriously than were those submitted by apprentices. Many complaints related to disobedience, insolence, drunkenness and theft. Thomas Francis, for instance, was discharged from his apprenticeship to Thomas Riley, cabinet-maker, in 1751 after embezzling goods belonging to his master²⁹, and one of John Linnell's apprentices stole a ring and ran away³⁰. John Steele frequented an apprentice club at the Lamb and Flag public house in Clerkenwell and often stayed out all night³¹. His master objected, and with good cause if it was anything like the club to which Francis Place belonged, which was financed by the apprentices robbing their masters to pay for their extravagances³². Other masters had different problems. Thomas Dibdin, apprenticed to the eminent upholsterer William Rawlins³³, showed more interest in making a model theatre than in the work set by his master. Rawlins finally threw the model on the fire and hit the youth. In this case, however, it was Rawlins who was chastised by the Chamberlain for degrading the boy and attempting to break the spirit of the London apprentice³⁴. Rawlins' apprentices, who considered themselves gentlemen, must have come from prosperous homes in order to pay the high fees charged by leading upholsterers³⁵ and it may have been that Dibdin's social background affected the sympathies of the Chamberlain who, as stated above, tended more often to side with the master.

Absence without permission was the charge most frequently brought against apprentices. Even without harsh treatment, the restrictions on their freedom, long working hours and the arduous nature of some of the work proved so irksome to some apprentices that they ran away. Such action could cost a master dearly, especially when a competent youth went missing in the latter years of an apprenticeship, and some masters went so far as

to place advertisements in the newspapers describing the youths in the hope that they would be recognised and brought back. Rene Stone, carver and gilder, described eighteen- or nineteen-year old Peter Russel as speaking French very well and wearing a blue-grey coat³⁶. William Mann, carver, not only notified the public that his apprentice, John Freelove, had run away but also warned them not to pay the youth any money on his account³⁷, while Mr. Kirk, chair-maker, went so far as to offer a reward for the return of his apprentice and threatened to prosecute anyone sheltering him³⁸. In view of the potential inconvenience and cost to the master caused by this offence, it is not surprising that it carried the harshest punishment meted out by the Chamberlain. This was usually a month in Bridewell, unless future good behaviour was promised or the master pleaded for the sentence to be reduced.

The manifold sources of tension between master and apprentice no doubt led some London masters to prefer country boys as apprentices³⁹. The majority of boys bound by London furniture-makers, however, were from London itself⁴⁰. The Inland Revenue apprenticeship lists do not systematically record addresses⁴¹ but some data are available for the years 1712-49 (Appendix I, Table 1). Upholsterers were the only furniture-makers to take less than half their boys from London: 37% of the youths bound were from London as opposed to 65% for cabinet-makers, 67% for gilders, 85% for carvers and 93% for carver and gilders (Appendix I, Table 1). Statistics taken from the records of the Joiners' Company for the years 1768-1817 confirm that a large proportion of boys from London were bound to carving and gilding (Appendix I, Table 2)⁴².

The more densely populated counties closest to London - Middlesex, Surrey, Kent, Essex, Hertfordshire and Sussex - not surprisingly provided a considerable proportion of the boys who came from outside London. Precise figures are not available because not all apprenticeships were recorded

(and of those that were, not all parental addresses were noted) but at least one quarter of apprentice furniture-makers trained in London who hailed from outside the capital came from the Home Counties (Appendix I, Table 3). Of the rest, some came from as far afield as Wales and Ireland.

The apprentices were either the sons of tradesmen or persons higher up the social scale (Appendix I, Table 4). The Inland Revenue apprenticeship records do not list parental occupations either regularly or systematically while those of the Joiners' and Upholders' Companies do not always indicate the master's craft and, therefore, the total number of apprentices referred to in Appendix I, Table 4 is not great. The records show clearly, however, that in the eighteenth century the majority of boys were the sons of tradesmen and this was still the case in the 'honourable' sector in 1850⁴³. The sons of a wide variety of tradesmen were attracted to furniture-making (Appendix I, Table 5). Although in the eighteenth century London furniture-makers mixed in a circle with many family, craft and business interconnections⁴⁴, the percentage of furniture-makers who put their children to their own craft was not great, reaching 11% at most (Appendix I, Table 4)⁴⁵.

The largest single social group apart from tradesmen was that covered by the general categorisation 'gentlemen', a term which applied to retired tradesmen who had acquired property as well as to the landed classes⁴⁶. Approximately 8-11% of the fathers of boys apprenticed to cabinet-makers were gentlemen, as compared with 16-17% for boys bound to carvers (Appendix I, Table 4). Approximately 22-25% of the fathers of boys bound to carver and gilders and to upholsterers were gentlemen (Appendix I, Table 4), as might be expected in the crafts which charged the highest premiums. Primogeniture meant that the younger sons of the landed gentry were forced into commerce and trade in order to make a living for themselves⁴⁷. Not surprisingly, they most frequently chose the most 'aristocratic' of the

furniture trades. Parents needed to be well-off to afford the high apprenticeship premiums asked by some furniture-makers. Those demanded by London furniture-makers were higher than anywhere else in the British Isles⁴⁸. The prestige attached to a London training was enormous: the capital led the country in design and a London-trained workman was considered to rank with the very best so far as workmanship was concerned. London-trained men who set up in the provinces or in North America went to great pains to stress that they had served their time in a London shop⁴⁹.

The hierarchy of status within the London furniture crafts was reflected in the premiums asked for each different craft (Appendix I, Table 6). Upholstery commanded the highest fees throughout the eighteenth century. Regarded as the most genteel and respectable of all the furniture-making occupations, some of the fees were as high as those asked by architects. When Francis Gilding took an apprentice in 1759, for instance, he charged £100⁵⁰, twice that asked by James Paine, architect, in the same year and the same as that asked by William Chambers, architect, in the following year⁵¹. Indeed, in top class firms, the apprentice upholsterer enjoyed a social status almost equal to that of the young man training to be an architect. The apprentices in the upholstery firm run by William Rawlins were referred to as 'articled young gentlemen'⁵², a term more usually associated with architects or solicitors. Whilst the term apprentice was considered too derogatory for certain snobbish upholsterers, at the end of the eighteenth century, certain pupil architects were still known as apprentices⁵³.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, cabinet-making fees were the next highest, averaging £11-21 (Appendix I, Table 6). Carving or carving and gilding premiums, however, either equalled or overtook those of cabinet-making in the second half of the century. Carving commanded fairly high fees but those asked for gilding were low. The fees asked for

a joint training in both carving and gilding, however, outstripped those asked for carving alone from the 1760s and by the first decade of the nineteenth century were almost as high as those asked by upholsterers (Appendix I, Table 6). Fees for chair-making were the lowest of all the six crafts studied, as befitted the least skilled.

Trade guides such as R. Campbell's London Tradesmen of 1747 and G. Kearsley's Table of Trades of 1786 list the premiums expected in every trade⁵⁴. Campbell stated that a fee of between £10-20 was expected with a cabinet-maker and between £20-50 for an upholsterer. Kearsley, nearly forty years later, put the figures at between £10-100 for a cabinet-maker and £50-150 for an upholsterer. The Inland Revenue apprenticeship records, however, indicate average cabinet-making premiums of £21 in the 1740s and £24 in the 1780s and average premiums of £33 and £52 respectively for upholstery (Appendix I, Table 6). Individual fees, however, were sometimes much higher than these averages or the trade guides suggest. Fees varied greatly from area to area (Appendix I, Table 7). With the exception of chair-making, the premiums asked in the West End were consistently the highest while those asked in the East End were generally the lowest. This reflected the organisation of the trade, with the better class shops situated in the West End. Fees not only fluctuated from area to area but from firm to firm and, on occasions, within firms themselves.

In general, fees were high because of the quality of the craft training offered. Collyer pointed out that the larger firms which retailed their own goods took bigger premiums than small trading masters⁵⁵, but within the same firm some premiums were considerably higher than others, even when apprentices were put to the same craft. It has been suggested that the 'business side of shopkeeping', i.e. retailing, was taught in addition to craft skills in return for very high premiums⁵⁶. There are indications, however, that it was not so much a retailing as a general managerial training

for which parents and guardians were willing to pay high fees. One of John Trotter's apprentices who paid an exceptionally large fee of £200 is known to have assisted Trotter in the running of his business in 1755 while he was still an apprentice and at a time when management was beginning to be recognised as a specialised function of the entrepreneur furniture-maker⁵⁷.

Within the limits of the information available and the accuracy of the apprenticeship records, it is possible to study a few firms in detail for the period c.1730-1810, the information concerning which is presented in tabulated form in Appendix I, Table 12. The case studies reveal certain common features. Firms with reputations for high quality craftsmanship charged the highest fees and asked reduced fees for any apprentice who served less than seven years; fees rose with the increasing reputation of individual firms and one craft, usually that of the proprietor or leading partner, sometimes commanded disproportionately large fees within a firm.

Benjamin Goodison, an eminent cabinet-maker (fl.c.1725-1767), was possibly apprenticed to the leading London furniture-maker James Moore, for whom he worked before he set up on his own about 1725⁵⁸. In that year he bound his first apprentice for £30, a very high fee for that date (see Appendix I, Table 6). A second boy, bound in 1736, was charged £20 as was his nephew, Benjamin Parran, bound in 1741. In the latter case, however, the fee may have been reduced because of Parran's close family relationship. The fee of £50, asked in 1746, was extremely high: if it was for a cabinet-maker, as is most likely, it was one of the highest in the first half of the eighteenth century. Although Goodison took over the royal appointment as early as 1727 after the death of Moore, it was not until the 1740s that he appears to have expanded his business and enjoyed a wider patronage including

that of the 1st and 2nd Viscounts Folkestone, the 4th Earl of Cardigan, Coke of Holkham and Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, a fact which was reflected in the increased premiums⁵⁹.

Goodison's main rival was the celebrated cabinet-maker William Hallett (1707-1781), but it was not until 1764 that Hallett asked as much as £50 for an apprentice. Hallett set up on his own in 1730 when, at the age of 23, he took his first apprentice for £15, a fee which was slightly lower than the average cabinet-making fee at that date. By the time he took his second apprentice in 1733, however, the fee had doubled, equalling the £30 asked by Goodison five years earlier. The 100% increase can be accounted for, in part at least, by his establishing a reputation and setting up in new premises in the intervening years⁶⁰. Hallett continued to ask the same fee when he took apprentices in 1737 and 1742 but after that date no apprentices are recorded until 1756 when Hallett registered an apprentice for £40. On this occasion, however, the term upholder was recorded after Hallett's name, as opposed to cabinet-maker as on the previous occasions. Whether this indicates that his firm was then a fully comprehensive one and that Hallett used the term to better identify his business, the loose use of the term by an Inland Revenue clerk or that the apprentice was bound to learn upholstery is not known. Hallett was also recorded as an upholder when he took an apprentice for £50 in 1764. The higher fees of the latter two bindings suggest that the two youths were taken on to train as upholsterers. If they were, their fees were relatively less high than those asked by Hallett for his own craft of cabinet-making.

Vile and Cobb together were sometimes referred to as cabinet-makers and sometimes as upholsterers when they registered apprentices. Fees of £60 and £63 were registered in 1752 and 1753 respectively for apprentices bound to William Vile and Company, cabinet-maker. If these youths were trained as cabinet-makers, the premiums were very high. This would support

suggestions that the firm's reputation was initially based on the cabinet-making skills of Vile, some of which were learned from Hallett⁶¹.

Similarly, France and Bradburn (fl.1764-77), who had worked for Vile and Cobb⁶², charged a high fee of £70 in 1767 when the occupation noted was that of cabinet-maker. When France's name appears alone, his craft of upholsterer is given and on three occasions he commanded fees of £70. £70 was a very reputable fee for an apprentice upholsterer training with royal furniture-makers but for an apprentice cabinet-maker it represented a fee very much higher than average (Appendix I, Table 6). Like other high class firms, they charged less for apprenticeships lasting less than the full time: a four-year term cost £20 whereas a boy taken on for two years paid only £10.

John West was one of the leading cabinet-makers in the years c.1730-60 and his fees should be compared to those of Benjamin Goodison and William Hallett. A John West 'Citizen and Joiner' took £105 with an apprentice in 1737⁶³ and it is just possible that this was the furniture-maker. There are, however, further entries for John West 'Citizen and Joiner' in the 1740s at the same time as entries for John West, cabinet-maker, of Covent Garden. The fees asked by the former were never more than £10.10s. 0d. in the 1740s whereas those charged by the latter in the same years were of the order of £30-40. John West, cabinet-maker, must have been well regarded by his fellow craftsmen since Henry Buck (fl.1732-41), who ran a cabinet and chair-making business in St. Paul's Churchyard, entrusted his son's training to West⁶⁴. Of West's apprentices, the one to achieve most fame was William Ince, cabinet-maker and designer (1738-1800), who was bound to West in 1752 for £40⁶⁵. Ince would have been taught drawing by West and it may well have been that West developed the youth's talents as a designer. There is no evidence that Ince had any design

training other than that received in West's workshops. It may have been therefore that the high fees charged by West in the 1750s reflected the high standards of design upheld by the firm. Indeed, the £84 he asked for a cabinet-maker in 1755 was the highest cabinet-making fee of that decade while the highest fees asked by furniture-makers in the following decade came from the firm in which West's former apprentice Ince was a partner.

High fees were also asked by those furniture-makers whose businesses included both upholstery and tapestry-making. William Bradshaw (fl.c.1728-1754) is recorded as 'upholder' in the apprenticeship records and asked £100 for an apprentice in 1735 at a time when he already enjoyed a considerable reputation not only as an upholsterer but also as a tapestry-maker⁶⁶. Another youth was taken on at the same time and charged only £35. The difference in fees may have reflected an additional training given to the youth for whom the larger premium was paid, possibly a managerial training or an understanding of tapestry-making. The sum of £35 compares well with the £30 paid in 1738 when Paul Saunders was apprenticed to Michael Bradshaw⁶⁷. Saunders, however, later ran a firm which combined both furniture-making and tapestry-making⁶⁸, suggesting that the £100 premium asked by William Bradshaw in 1735 was for a craft and managerial training. Although Saunders carried on the tradition of combining upholstery and tapestry work, he is recorded as simply 'Citizen and Upholder' in the Inland Revenue apprenticeship records. The rise in fees from the £63 asked in 1754 and 1755 to the £100 in 1758 may well have resulted from the increasing reputation of Saunders who had been appointed as 'yeoman arras-worker to the Great Wardrobe' in 1757⁶⁹. George Smith Bradshaw, upholsterer, whose partnership with Paul Saunders ended in October 1756⁷⁰, was referred to as an upholsterer when he bound apprentices, with the exception of an apprentice bound in April 1758 when he is recorded as a cabinet-maker.

The relatively low fee of £31.10s. 0d. asked on that occasion compared with the £84 charged a few weeks later, suggests that the boy was taken on as an apprentice cabinet-maker.

The fees asked by Ince and Mayhew (1759-1804), were the highest of the 1760s. Mayhew had been apprenticed to an upholsterer called Bradshaw, probably William Bradshaw⁷¹, while his partner had served his time with John West. Together they formed a formidable partnership. They asked a fee of £60 for their first apprentice taken in 1760 shortly after the partnership had begun, and the young man had published the first parts of their design book, The Universal System of Household Furniture⁷². Thereafter, the fees rose rapidly: £105 was asked in 1764, £157.10s. 0d. in 1766 and £210 in 1775. The partners are recorded as 'cabinet-makers etc.' in the Inland Revenue lists, while the 1764 entry is in the name of John Mayhew, upholsterer, alone. Some of the boys taken on may have been apprentice upholsterers because Robert Kennett, bound in 1766, later called himself an upholsterer⁷³. This, in turn, however, may have referred to the fact that he ran a general furniture-making firm rather than to his apprenticed craft. Whatever the craft, the fees were very high compared with the average asked in the West End (Appendix I, Table 6). Parents wanting to place their sons in furniture-making establishments in the 1760s and 70s were prepared to pay more to place them in this firm than in any other in London. When Ince and Mayhew took a fee of £210 with an apprentice in 1776, it was the largest asked to that date for a furniture-making apprentice.

John Trotter asked almost as much in 1754 when he took on Samuel Betts for £200. Trotter is referred to as 'Citizen and Joiner' in the Inland Revenue apprenticeship records but he gave his occupation as cabinet-maker when he subscribed to Chippendale's Director in 1754⁷⁴, the same year in which he was appointed as royal upholsterer⁷⁵. He ran a

comprehensive furniture-making firm but it is not known to which crafts his apprentices were bound. The high fee asked for Betts is in distinct contrast to the low fees of 10 guineas and £25 asked in 1749 and 1753 respectively, before Trotter won the royal commission. The latter was almost certainly a factor in increasing Trotter's fees but the managerial training given to Betts, who acted as Trotter's assistant in dealing with the Lord Chamberlain's Office, is more likely to account for the extremely large fee taken when Betts was apprenticed⁷⁶.

The only fee higher than that asked by Ince and Mayhew in 1775 was that of £250 asked in 1787 by Thomas Waldron, at the height of his reputation as an inventor after patenting his vermin-free bedstead in 1785⁷⁷. By contrast, an apprentice taken before the registration of his patent was asked only £40. Although Waldron is referred to as a cabinet-maker in the Inland Revenue apprenticeship records, he called himself an upholsterer when he registered his patent⁷⁸. The crafts to which he bound his apprentices are, unfortunately, not known.

Gillow of Oxford Street charged fees that were, in the main, higher than average for the West End in the 1770s and 80s but, in the 1790s, there was a wide variation in their apprenticeship premiums. The low fees and shortened periods of apprenticeship recorded in that decade suggest that some apprentices were given a less thorough craft training than others. Gillow, known to be one of the larger firms of the early nineteenth century⁷⁹, produced not only work of very high quality but also a considerable amount of quality goods at reasonable cost which sometimes attracted comments about their lack of originality in design⁸⁰. The expansion into this growing middle and upper class market, which weighed quality against cost, was probably the reason why Gillow, in contrast to other West End firms, dropped their fees in the 1790s and also took on boys for less than seven

years. Seven apprentices were taken on for fees of £10 or less in the years 1796-1805 and three of those served less than seven years. Those youths who paid a fee of only £6.10s.0d. can hardly have expected to receive a craft training similar to those who paid fees of £60 or over in the same firm.

In the range of production undertaken, Gillow resembled the firm of Seddon of Aldersgate Street more closely than it did other West End firms. Seddon, the largest firm in London in the late eighteenth century⁸¹, took on the largest number of apprentices. The apprenticeship fees varied greatly, suggesting a wider variation in craft standards within their workshops than within those of the leading West End firms. The large number of boys bound to Seddon for no premium - fourteen in forty years if his own sons are excluded - suggests that these boys were not taken on as a special consideration but rather that the firm used these apprentices, all of whom were taken on for seven years, as cheap labour. Although no crafts are specified in the apprenticeship records, the fees of between £10-30 most often asked for the remaining apprentices were not high by cabinet-making standards.

Two fees, however, were outstandingly high. £105 was asked in 1773 when Christopher Frampton was apprenticed, and it is possible that the fee was high because he was to be trained as a carver since the record of his apprenticeship is the only one in which George Seddon is referred to as a carver⁸². When Frampton completed his term in 1780, and another youth was apprenticed in his place for the same fee, however, there is no indication that the boy was to be trained as a carver. The apprentice was James Hinchliff, son of the late John Hinchliff, a silk weaver⁸³ and member of the Hinchliff family of mercers which supplied the royal household in the mid-eighteenth century and which had connections with furniture-makers⁸⁴. The Hinchliff family may well have been advised by friends and

contacts in the furniture trade that Seddon was the best firm within which a young craftsman and aspiring businessman could familiarise himself with all aspects of his future occupation.

The data concerning apprenticeships provide an indication of the number of apprentices taken by certain firms. Unfortunately, not all apprentices were registered with the Inland Revenue and therefore the figures taken from those records represent a minimum number of youths bound. The records of the Joiners' Company show, for instance, that the firm of Seddon took twenty-three apprentices besides the thirteen which appear in the Inland Revenue records (Appendix I, Table 12). The majority of these were taken for no premium and, therefore, were not registered because there was no tax to pay, but some boys were simply not registered. Others were registered at a lower fee in the Inland Revenue records than in those of the Joiners' Company. Most West End firms did not bind boys without a consideration except in exceptional circumstances and, therefore, it should not be assumed that in every case over 50% of the apprentices are not listed in the Inland Revenue records. Nevertheless, there are notable exceptions from the records. Robert Sadd, for instance, is known to have been apprenticed in the firm of Linnell but he does not appear in the Inland Revenue records⁷⁵. Moreover, the firm of Ince and Mayhew which lasted almost half a century is only recorded as taking eight apprentices in that time, and Thomas Chippendale is recorded as taking only three.

The apprenticeship records, however, do throw useful light on the number of apprentices in a firm in a given year. This evidence is particularly useful when trying to establish the size of one enterprise in relation to another. Giles Grendey, for instance, whose firm has long been considered to be one of the largest in the first half of the eighteenth century, had at least four and sometimes six apprentices in the years 1734-43.

He had as many if not more apprentices at any one time than certain eminent firms of the third quarter of the eighteenth century, including Vile and Cobb, Linnell, Ince and Mayhew, Chippendale, France and Bradburn, Paul Saunders and George Smith Bradshaw. The leading West End firms c.1750-1775 employed about forty to fifty craftsmen⁸⁶, while an average number of apprentices was three to four, thus giving a ratio of one apprentice for approximately every ten to seventeen craftsmen employed.

Gillow took on more apprentices than any other West End firm. Fourteen were bound between 1771 and 1813. The number of apprentices in the firm at any one time rose steeply in the 1790s. There were four apprentices in 1789 but by 1794 there were ten, with ten again in 1797. The number of apprentices recorded falls away after 1798 when there were only three or four apprentices in any given year but how far this tailing off in numbers is a reflection of the demise of the apprenticeship system in the latter years of the nineteenth century is not certain. Gillow was one of the largest firms at that period and, in 1813, employed at least one hundred workmen⁸⁷. There are, unfortunately, no details of apprenticeships for that year. If figures from earlier years are used, then the ratio of apprentices varies from one apprentice for every ten to fourteen workmen between the years 1791-98 to one apprentice for every twenty-five to thirty-three workmen if there were only three to four apprentices in the years 1799-1810. The ratio of 1 : 10-14, which uses the more reliable number of apprentices taken in the 1790s, corresponds to the rough average for the West End firms in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. That of 1 : 25-33, which is based on the number of apprentices taken in the 1800s, however, approximates more closely to the ratio for the firm of Seddon.

Seddon had five apprentices in 1757 and more than ten apprentices during the years 1766-69. In the 1770s, the figure fluctuated between four and nine and, in the 1780s, between five and ten. In 1790 and

1791, there were ten apprentices but the number dropped to six by 1793.

The subsequent drop in figures may, however, be a result of a falling off of entries in the apprenticeship records rather than a reduction in the actual number of apprentices taken. Seddon employed about eighty workmen in 1768⁸⁸, a figure which gives a ratio of one apprentice for every seven workmen. This is a much higher percentage of apprentices per workman than that which operated in the West End firms. When the firm expanded its workforce in the 1780s and employed between 300-400 work people⁸⁹, however, this percentage was not maintained, with one apprentice taken on for approximately every thirty to forty workmen.

The firm of Seddon undoubtedly undertook a great deal of work which was less skilled than that done in the main West End shops such as Linnell or Ince and Mayhew. In the period during which the firm was establishing itself, it took a greater number of apprentices than did West End firms but the conclusion that these apprentices were the main means by which the firm expanded the production of lesser quality furniture should be avoided because the firm later took on far fewer apprentices per journeyman than did West End firms. The basis of Seddon's greatly expanded production in the 1780s was the employment of more journeymen.

All the boys apprenticed by George Seddon appear to have served the traditional seven year term. In the eighteenth century some London furniture-makers took on boys for longer, but these never numbered more than a few at any one time⁹⁰. The reasons for extending the number of years traditionally served are not clear. A study of apprenticeships in the Carpenters' Company in the sixteenth century has shown that terms of eight or nine years were not uncommon, particularly for boys who came from the provinces and therefore it has been suggested that provincial boys might have needed a longer training⁹¹. Unfortunately, the Inland Revenue apprenticeship records do not give addresses after 1752 and, of the few

furniture-makers recorded with their addresses, the majority are not provincial ones. The fees asked for extended apprenticeships were not higher on average than those asked for the traditional term and, in some cases, were lower (Appendix I, Table 6). It seems unlikely therefore that the extra time served represented an additional training in either craft or management since this would probably have led to higher fees being asked. Whatever the reason, and it may have been different reasons in particular cases, such extended terms were exceptional.

Although there were complaints in the early eighteenth century that certain apprentice furniture-makers were not serving seven years⁹², most boys trained as furniture-makers in the eighteenth century served the full seven years (Appendix I, Table 8). In 1747, R. Campbell called it 'madness' for a youth who had no prospect of establishing himself in a retail business at the end of an apprenticeship to serve a seven-year term⁹³, and the number who did so declined gradually throughout the century (Appendix I, Table 8). It was not until the 1780s, however, that short-term apprenticeships began to increase rapidly in furniture-making. Those crafts particularly affected were cabinet-making, upholstery and chair-making (Appendix I, Table 9). Even so, at the end of the eighteenth century, the majority of apprentice furniture-makers continued to serve seven years.

The West End, which dominated the metropolitan trade in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, took the largest proportion of short-term apprenticeships in those years (Appendix I, Table 11). That proportion declined, however, as other areas developed as centres of furniture-making. In cabinet-making, for instance, the percentage of short-term bindings in the East End increased from about 17% in the 1760s to 29% in the 1800s. The premiums asked for short-term apprenticeships

(Appendix I, Table 6) were not, on average, significantly lower than those asked for seven-year bindings. This was particularly so after about 1760 and suggests that, after that date, these apprenticeships were not generally regarded as inferior within the furniture trade as a whole. The top-class West End firms, however, regularly charged lower premiums for boys taken on for less than seven years. There, in workshops where there was little or no division of labour or dilution of craft skills and where apprentices were given an all-round training in every aspect of the craft, an apprenticeship of less than seven years was regarded as inferior. Even the West End trade did not escape unscathed, however, as the apprenticeship system declined rapidly in the late 1790s and 1800s and was formally dismantled in 1814⁹⁴. Although some seven-year training continued, by 1820 the West End cabinet-makers' trade society was reduced to urging the maintenance of a five-year apprenticeship⁹⁵.

At the same time as the length of time served came under threat, so too did other aspects of the apprenticeship system. A system known as 'outdoor' apprenticeship developed in the second half of the eighteenth century. Youths, and also adults, were taken on by a master for a given number of years at a given rate of pay and, as the name implies, did not live with the master⁹⁶. The system spread rapidly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and, by 1815, it was so prevalent in areas outside the West End that the Chaplain of Bridewell considered it one of the main causes of hooliganism amongst apprentices⁹⁷. Fees were sometimes asked but they were smaller than those asked for traditional apprenticeships. Carvers, for instance, asked about £40-50 for 'indoor' apprentices in 1850 whereas they asked only about £15 for 'outdoor' apprentices⁹⁸. The apprentice was still expected to do his master's bidding and the master was obliged to keep him until the end of the agreed term although, by the mid-nineteenth century, there were complaints that masters hired and fired

apprentices at will⁹⁹.

Low wages, or sometimes a percentage of earnings, were offered to the 'outdoor' apprentice. Wage payment clearly went against the whole concept of training without remuneration; it was a recognition of the fact that many apprentices were used as cheap labour. In 1789, Francis Place took up an 'outdoor' apprenticeship with his brother-in-law, a chair carver, who offered him eighteen shillings per week for the first three years but Place soon terminated the arrangement because he considered the wages too low¹⁰⁰. This example has been correctly used to illustrate how far the apprenticeship system had declined because Place was an adult who had previously been apprenticed in another trade¹⁰¹. It also indicates, however, that in 1789 some form of craft training, albeit in a bastardised form, was still required before one could work as a chair carver. In the early nineteenth century, a five-year 'outdoor' apprenticeship was general in cabinet-making outside the West End, with wages increasing as the apprenticeship progressed: an accepted weekly wage for a youth at that time was 2/6d. in the first year, 5/- in the second, 10/- in the third, 15/- in the fourth and £1 in the fifth and final year¹⁰².

Although the trade societies fought against the repeal of the protective legislation without success, the West End cabinet-makers' society managed to enforce both a five-year apprenticeship and a closed shop in certain firms¹⁰³. In the 1820s, the society would not admit anyone to membership who had not worked or served five years to the craft¹⁰⁴. Their jurisdiction, however, did not extend to all West End firms, let alone others outside that area. It was not sufficiently strong to restrain certain firms, including one which supplied furniture to the royal household, from employing men who had not served this length of time¹⁰⁵. William Lovett, who had been apprenticed as a rope-maker but showed considerable

natural ability as a woodworker, managed to obtain work as a cabinet-maker in certain West End shops in the 1820s. He learned the various jobs by watching the other men very closely and bought them drinks in return for their help¹⁰⁶. There was, however, a great deal of feeling against non-apprenticed men and, when it was discovered that Lovett had not served his time as a cabinet-maker, the workmen threatened to set 'Mother Shorney' at him. This was a trade expression for 'the putting away of your tools, the injuring of your work, and annoying you in such a way as to drive you out of the shop'¹⁰⁷. Lovett was engaged by a shop for one year and paid 1 guinea per week as an adult 'outdoor' apprentice before he was able to move to another job where he could command full wages¹⁰⁸. He was finally admitted to membership of the trade society only after he had served 'a sufficient number of years' - almost certainly five - in a good shop¹⁰⁹.

By the 1840s, Lovett would probably not have been admitted at all so tight was the control exercised by the trade society over entry into the leading shops¹¹⁰. A five-year apprenticeship was maintained in many West End establishments¹¹¹ and in certain shops the full seven-year training was continued¹¹². But the society represented only about 30% of cabinet-makers working in the West End at the height of its membership in the 1830s and 40s and, by 1850, it represented only 18%¹¹³. Outside the protection of the society were those workers in the quality trade who worked in shops where the five-year apprenticeship was threatened. Beyond them was a growing mass of labour which found employment in the dishonourable sector where apprenticeship had little meaning.

Wood carvers in the quality trade also managed to retain some form of apprenticeship, partly because of the length of time it took to learn the skills. Henry Mayhew was informed in 1850 that it took nearly two years before an apprentice could assist with work sold to the public¹¹⁴. Employers

therefore were less able to train boys quickly in one aspect of the craft and use them as cheap labour. Upholstery also managed to postpone some of the worst problems caused by the breakdown of the apprenticeship system. As stated in Chapter 2, there was relatively little division of labour within upholstery until the second half of the nineteenth century because much of the unskilled work was carried out by unapprenticed females¹¹⁵. In the 1870s, every new member of the London upholsterers' trade society, which represented the most skilled workers, still had to prove that he was a 'super upholsterer', skilled in all the subdivisions of the craft, even if he was not certain of employment as a general upholsterer by that date¹¹⁶. In the 1880s, however, even the most 'aristocratic' upholsterers had to face the fact that their craft had been detrimentally affected by the division of labour¹¹⁷.

Only the better West End shops offered an apprentice furniture-maker an all-round craft training by the mid-nineteenth century. Elsewhere the picture was different. Some boys were trained for the full seven years but only as fitters-up of dressing-cases¹¹⁸. Many masters took on youths simply to obtain apprenticeship fees while other exploited 'stiff fellows' who could work hard¹¹⁹, some apprenticed others merely engaged and dismissed at will¹²⁰. There was no limit to the number of apprentices taken after 1814 but the 'honourable' trade continued to take few¹²¹. In the 'dishonourable' sector, however, 'apprentice' labour became the norm after about 1820. A great number of small garret-master cabinet-makers who did not employ any journeymen had between one and four apprentices each¹²². In the fancy trade, numbers were even higher: one master had as many as eight apprentices and another had fourteen¹²³. The demand for child labour depressed the average school-leaving age in East London, which was just over ten years in 1845¹²⁴. George F. Gibbs, the son of a merchant's clerk of Curtain Road, was just such a child: at the age of ten he worked for a carver as a

'passer-up',¹²⁵. The final degradation came when the small master in the 'dishonourable' sector could no longer afford even to keep apprentices and used the labour of his own children instead. An apprentice had to be paid no matter how small the wage but the labour of a man's own children was free. Such men found it to their advantage to marry early and produce children frequently. In 1850, most East End garret-master cabinet-makers had five or six children who, from the age of about six, worked at small tasks. This system of 'breeding slaves' marked the final stage in the breakdown of the apprenticeship system¹²⁶.

Footnotes

- 1 Margaret Gay Davies, The Enforcement of English Apprenticeship. A Study in Applied Mercantilism 1563-1643, Cambridge, Mass., 1956 and O. J. Dunlop, English Apprenticeship and Child Labour, 1912, pp. 118, 121 and 228-30
- 2 T. K. Derry, 'The Repeal of the Apprenticeship Clauses of the Statute of Apprentices', Economic History Review, vol. III, 1931-2, pp. 67-87
- 3 ibid., p. 73; H.A. Shearing, 'The Social Structure and Development of London, circa 1800-1830', unpublished D. Phil., University of Oxford, 1955, pp. 243-5
- 4 Derry, op. cit., p. 72 and M. Dorothy George, England in Transition, 1953, p. 126
- 5 see pp. 88 + 164
- 6 GL. UCR.Bindings, Apl 1967
- 7 A standard indenture of the Joiners' Company, signed by William Linnell and Francis Cooke, 1763, is reproduced in Helena Hayward and Pat Kirkham, William and John Linnell. Eighteenth Century London Furniture Makers, 1980, vol. I, Appendix VI
- 8 When John Linnell took an apprentice for no fee in 1792, the boy's mother had to provide overcoats and small items such as handkerchiefs. Stockings, and possibly other items of clothings, were provided by Linnell. Hayward and Kirkham, Linnell, vol. I, p. 183
- 9 ibid., p. 183
- 10 ibid., p. 42
- 11 M. Dorothy George, London Life in the Eighteenth Century, 1966, p. 279
- 12 P. A. Kirkham, 'Samuel Norman: a study of an eighteenth-century Craftsman', The Burlington Magazine, Aug 1969, p. 401, n.6
- 13 Joseph Collyer, The Parent's and Guardian's Directory, 1761, pp. 310-11
- 14 Public Advertiser, 22 Jan 1757
- 15 Collyer, op. cit., p. 309 and G. Kearsley, Table of Trades, 1786, p. 41
- 16 Steven R. Smith, 'The London Apprentices as Seventeenth-Century Adolescents', Past and Present, no. 61, Nov 1973, pp. 149-56, George, England in Transition, p. 120, and George, London Life, p. 271
- 17 Hayward and Kirkham, Linnell, vol. I, p. 183
- 18 GL. CCR, Complaint Books 1786-1867
- 19 E. T. Joy, 'Some Aspects of The London Furniture Industry In The Eighteenth Century', unpublished M.A. thesis, University of London, 1955, p. 45
- 20 GL. CCR, Complaint Book, 2 Aug 1789

- 21 ibid., 2 July 1790
- 22 ibid., 2 July 1790
- 23 for instance, Henry Vandyk, carver, BL. Middlesex Sessions Books Calendar (typescript). Book 1071, Feb 1750
- 24 GL. CCR, Complaint Book, 1, May 1786. Physical violence as such was not recognised as sufficient reason to discharge apprentices who were often considered to have provoked their masters
- 25 Simon Jarvis, 'Giles Grendey (1693-1780)', Country Life, 6 June 1974, p. 1418
- 26 Edward Edwards, 'An Account Of The Life of Mr. Edwards', pp. i-ii, in Anecdotes of Painters, 1808
- 27 see Edward Geoffrey O'Donoghue, Bridewell Hospital: palace, prison, schools, 1929, vol. 2, p. 179 and Alfred James Copland, Bridewell Royal Hospital: Past and Present, 1888, p. 79
- 28 GL. CCR, Complaint Book, 4, Mar 1802
- 29 BL. Middlesex Sessions Books 1085, June 1751
- 30 Hayward and Kirkham, Linnell, vol. I, pp. 42-3 + 181-2
- 31 GL. CCR, Complaint Book, 2, Oct 1791
- 32 George, London Life, p. 271
- 33 LFM, p. 148; see also p. 263
- 34 George, London Life, p. 385, no. 35
- 35 see p. 81 and Appendix I, Table 6
- 36 Daily Advertiser, 6 Sep 1745
- 37 ibid., 24 May 1744
- 38 ibid., 9 Feb 1743
- 39 Public Advertiser, 23 Jan 1759
- 40 Appendix I, Table 1. So too were boys bound to members of the Stationers' Company. Ellic Howe, The London Bookbinders, 1950, p. 28, n. 1
- 41 The Inland Revenue apprenticeship records list stamp duty paid on indentures registered between 1710 and 1811. Statistics taken from these records give only approximate figures because not all apprentices were registered. Masters did not have to pay stamp duty for apprentices taken on at the common or public charge of any township or parish or by or out of any public charity. The trades of masters were recorded. The collation of the data, reproduced in tabulated form in Appendix I, assumed that the apprentice followed the craft recorded against the

continued...

- 41 (continued) master's name, which was not always the same in each entry. Cases in which the apprentice did not follow the craft recorded after the master's name are known but, despite these exceptions, the tables drawn up from these records provide valuable, if approximate, details concerning furniture-making apprentices. see Apprenticeship Records as Sources For Genealogy In The Public Record Office, PRO Leaflet 26, March 1978
- 42 The records of the Upholders' Company do not sufficiently specify the masters' crafts to allow any estimate of the percentage of London boys bound as upholsterers. The few upholsterers recorded in the Joiners' Company between 1773 and 1817, however, all bound London boys.
- 43 Henry Mayhew, 'Of The Furniture Workers', Letter LXIII, Morning Chronicle, 1 Aug 1850
- 44 see p. 184
- 45 Upholsterers showed the highest percentage (Appendix I, Table 4) but the small number of examples obtained for upholsterers restrains one from suggesting that more boys regularly followed their fathers in that craft than in other areas of furniture-making
- 46 Other occupations associated with the land were also represented. 'Yeoman', i.e. small landowners or respectable farmers who were freeholders of land to an annual value of fifty shillings, for instance, accounted for 12% of the fathers of apprentice cabinet-makers in the years 1716-30. 8% of those whose sons were bound to cabinet-makers through the Joiners' Company in the years 1768-77 were yeomen while another 10% were farmers of some sort. The same company records reveal only 2.5% of the fathers of apprentices bound to cabinet-makers as yeomen in the years 1773-1817 but farmers accounted for another 5% (Appendix I, Table 4)
- 47 Peter Burke, 'Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century London', The London Journal, vol. 3, no. 2, 1977, p. 158.
- 48 The firm of Gillow, for instance, charged higher premiums for youths apprenticed in their London branch than they did for those apprenticed in Lancaster. PRO IR 1/passim
- 49 R. W. Symonds, Furniture Making in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century England, 1955, pp. 130-1 and Marion S. Carson, 'Thomas Affleck. A London Cabinet-maker in Colonial Philadelphia', Connoisseur, Mar 1968, p. 188. In 1850, Henry Mayhew was told that one of the first questions asked by provincial employers was whether or not craftsmen had experience of London work. Morning Chronicle, 1 Aug 1850
- 50 PRO IR 1/22
- 51 ibid.
- 52 George, London Life, p. 385, n.35
- 53 J. Mordaunt Crook, 'The pre-Victorian Architect: professionalism and patronage', Architectural History, vol. 12, 1969, pp. 62, 64 + 69
- 54 George, London Life, p. 360, n.8 discusses eighteenth century trade guides

- 55 Collyer, Directory, p. 87
- 56 E. T. Joy, 'London Furniture Industry', pp. 23-4. Joy bases his statement on Campbell's remark that it was folly for youths who were not destined to work in the retail side of their trade to serve a seven year apprenticeship (Campbell, London Tradesmen, 1747, p. 283) but this comment concerns length of time served rather than fees charged.
- 57 PRO IR 1/19 and LC 9/211; see also p. 164
- 58 Geoffrey Beard, 'Three eighteenth-century cabinet-makers: Moore, Goodison and Vile', The Burlington Magazine, July 1977, p. 483. Beard assumed that the term master meant that Goodison was Moore's apprentice but Moore may only have been Goodison's employer.
- 59 GCM, pp. 44-7
- 60 ibid., pp. 49-50
- 61 Beard, op. cit., p. 485; see also p. 112
- 62 Geoffrey Beard, 'William Vile Again', Furniture History, vol. XI, 1975, pp. 113-5; see also pp. 112-3
- 63 PRO IR 1/15
- 64 PRO IR 1/17
- 65 see p. 113
- 66 Francis Sheppard, ed. Survey of London, The Parish of St. Anne, Soho, vol. XXXIV, 1960, Appendix 'Soho Tapestry Makers', pp. 517-8 and GCM, pp. 50-1
- 67 Saunders was turned over to Richard Bradshaw. GL. UCR, Bindings, Nov + Dec 1738 resp. Whether or not these Bradshaws were related to William Bradshaw is not known
- 68 Survey of London, op. cit., pp. 518-20
- 69 ibid., p. 519
- 70 ibid., pp. 518-20 and London Gazette, 26-30 Oct 1756
- 71 Public Advertiser, 25 Jan 1759; see also p. 111
- 72 see p. 113
- 73 PRO C12 114/18
- 74 Christopher Gilbert, The Life and Work of Thomas Chippendale, 1978, vol. 1, pp. 71 + 101
- 75 LFM, p. 187

- 76 see n. 56 and p. 164
- 77 see pp. 245-6
- 78 Patent no. 3650
- 79 see p. 146
- 80 Ralph Fastnedge, Sheraton Furniture, 1962, p. 36
- 81 ibid., p. 36; see also pp. 114-5 + 144
- 82 GL. JCR. Bindings, 7 July 1773
- 83 ibid., Nov 1780
- 84 His father was probably John Hinchliff, Mercer, whose brothers Thomas and William were royal mercers (PRO LC5/56/105/106). The latter was noted by Beard who claimed that Hinchliff belonged to a well-known family of sculptors and carvers (Beard, 'Three eighteenth-century cabinet-makers', p. 483). William and John Hinchliff also knew the furniture-maker John Bradburn (PRO LC5/106)
- 85 Hayward and Kirkham, Linnell, I, Appendix VII, p. 182
- 86 see pp. 139-40
- 87 see p.146
- 88 see p.145
- 89 see p.145
- 90 The Inland Revenue apprenticeship records list only 14 cabinet-makers, 8 carvers, 3 chair-makers, two upholsterers, two gilders and a carver and gilder who were apprenticed for more than seven years in London in the eighteenth century.
- 91 B. W. C. Alford and T.C. Barker, A History of the Carpenters' Company , 1968, p. 30
- 92 Henry Laverock Phillips, Annals of the Worshipful Company of Joiners of the City of London, privately printed, 1915, p. 48
- 93 Campbell, London Tradesmen, p. 283
- 94 T. K. Derry, 'Repeal of Apprenticeship Clauses', p. 14
- 95 William Lovett, Life and Struggles of William Lovett In his Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge and Freedom, 1967 ed., p. 25; see also pp. 293 + 296-9
- 96 see George, London Life, pp. 234, 268-9 + 382-3 and Joy, 'Furniture Industry', p. 50
- 97 George, op. cit., p. 268

- 98 Henry Mayhew, 'Of The Fancy Cabinet-Makers of London', Letter LXIV, Morning Chronicle, 8 Aug 1850
- 99 ibid.
- 100 George, London Life, p. 376, n.66 and Joy, 'Furniture Industry', p. 51
- 101 ibid.
- 102 PP. 1888 (13), vol. XX, Sweating System, p. 211
- 103 E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, 1968, p. 279
- 104 Lovett, Life and Struggles, p. 25
- 105 ibid., p. 25
- 106 ibid., p. 25
- 107 ibid., p. 25
- 108 ibid., p. 25
- 109 ibid., p. 26
- 110 Thompson, English Working Class, p. 278
- 111 Lovett, Life and Struggles, p. 30 and PP. 1888, Sweating System, p. 443
- 112 PP. 1888, Sweating System, p. 382
- 113 Morning Chronicle, 1 Aug 1850. Mayhew only gives figures for society and non-society cabinet-makers in 1850 when 18% were unionised. Using the same number of workers as in 1850 (1,700) to the number in membership in 1846 (546), the resulting proportion of unionised workers is 32%. see also p. 303
- 114 Morning Chronicle, 8 Aug 1850
- 115 see pp. 64-6
- 116 PP. 1888, Sweating System, p. 303
- 117 ibid.
- 118 Henry Mayhew, 'Of The Slop Cabinet Trade', Letter LXV, Morning Chronicle 15 Aug 1850
- 119 ibid.
- 120 Henry Mayhew, 'Of The "Garret Masters" Of The Cabinet Trade', Letter LXVI, Morning Chronicle, 22 Aug 1850
- 121 Morning Chronicle, 1 Aug 1850
- 122 ibid., 22 Aug 1850

- 132 ibid., 22 Aug 1850
- 124 Francis Sheppard, London 1808-1870: The Infernal Wen, 1971, p. 231
- 125 PRO HO 107 1851, 1534.2.5
- 126 Morning Chronicle, 22 Aug 1850

C H A P T E R 4

THE COMPREHENSIVE MANUFACTURING FIRM

THE COMPREHENSIVE MANUFACTURING FIRM

The organisation within a single workplace of the main crafts involved in the production of furniture was one of the major structural developments within furniture-making in London in the eighteenth century. The increase in demand for high quality goods was met not by expanding petty production but by increasing the size of firms and their scope of production. From about 1740 there was a movement within the West End quality trade towards firms which made, on their own premises, the furniture which they supplied to customers. These comprehensive manufacturing units dominated the quality trade until the 1870s.

While the demarcations between the furniture-making crafts and the sub-divisions within them were based largely on the materials used and the special skills necessary to work them, the bringing together of different craft skills was the result of different factors. It was an attempt to rationalise the production of complete items of furniture and the supply of those pieces necessary to furnish an entire room or house¹. The various craftsmen and materials were brought together by entrepreneurs in an attempt to maximise profits. They also organised and supervised the production process. Most of these entrepreneurs were craft-trained at some aspect of furniture-making until the early nineteenth century, at least, even if they never, or only rarely, worked at their craft once they ran a sizeable business. Some knowledge of furniture-making was useful to entrepreneurs who developed comprehensive manufacturing units but, without capital and entrepreneurial skills, no craftsman could hope to make the successful transition to business man. Moreover, as firms increased in size and scope, the craft origins of the owner or owners became increasingly irrelevant because their particular area or areas of craft expertise represented only part of the firm's overall production and

they were increasingly drawn into management. It mattered little whether the entrepreneur was a master upholsterer, a master cabinet-maker or any other kind of furniture-maker. Anyone with sufficient capital could establish a furniture-making firm and it needed business acumen as well as a knowledge of the production process to run it successfully.

In 1700, the craftsmen described in Chapters 1 and 2 usually worked in a firm where only one craft was practised or, where more than one craft was represented, production centred around one craft, usually that of the owner. Craft and business ran more or less parallel². The entrepreneur furniture-makers built up their businesses around their own crafts but certain of them expanded into other areas of production. In the first half of the eighteenth century, firms which embraced more than one craft usually either combined carving and gilding, which were closely associated in the production process, or were based on either cabinet-making or upholstery.

Whilst a great deal of chair-making remained independently organised³, certain entrepreneurs produced both cabinet work and chairs. When expanding a business, it was a sensible step for a master cabinet-maker to undertake chair production, the supervision of which did not involve a knowledge of unfamiliar materials. Giles Grendey (1693-1780), known variously as 'cabinet-maker', 'cabinet-maker and chair-maker' and 'Greenday, the chair maker', is the best known of the early eighteenth century furniture-makers to produce and sell chairs as well as cabinet ware⁴. The firm of John Belchier (1684-1753), of St. Paul's Churchyard, which specialised in cabinet work also produced chairs⁵, and Francis Croxford, whose business was probably one of the largest in London before his death in 1733, produced both cabinet goods and chairs⁶.

Some cabinet-making firms sold glass, usually made up into

looking or pier-glasses bordered by carved and gilt frames. Gerrit Jensen, for instance, was referred to as a 'cabinett maker and glasse seller' when he was appointed as royal cabinet-maker in 1689⁷ and his successor, John Gumley, belonged to a family firm which not only sold a wide range of cabinet ware, looking-glasses and frames but was also closely associated with the production of glass⁸. In the early years of the eighteenth century, Gumley's premises in the Strand were described as a 'glass gallery'⁹ and the shop run by the cabinet-maker Philip Arbunot, who also worked in the Strand at the same time, was described as a 'looking glass shop'¹⁰. The great variety and number of glasses and frames as well as other items of furniture produced by the larger firms such as Jensen and Gumley suggest that carving and frame-making, together with cabinet-making, were probably carried out within these firms.

Chair-making and upholstery were brought together in the first half of the eighteenth century. The partnership of Henry Buck, chair-maker, and Richard Farmer, upholsterer, in the 1720s and 30s, testifies to an early attempt to combine the two crafts within a single business¹¹. The combination was convenient because the frames for upholstered seat furniture had to be bought in by upholsterers who did not employ chair-makers and vice versa. Apart from cabinet-makers, it was mostly upholsterers who employed chair-makers in the first half of the eighteenth century¹². However, by the middle of the century, certain chair-makers had themselves become entrepreneurs and employed upholsterers to bottom their chairs¹³. They also sold a wide variety of household furniture, particularly items such as chests-of-drawers and looking-glass frames, suggesting that they also employed cabinet-makers, carvers and gilders¹⁴. Unfortunately, no detailed information is available about the establishment of a comprehensive firm based around chair-making.

Cabinet-making and upholstery were the two main areas of production

within any furniture-making firm: upholstery covered the 'soft' side of the trade, while cabinet-making was the principal woodworking craft. Indeed, the term 'cabinet-maker and upholsterer' was used in the second half of the eighteenth century to refer to entrepreneur furniture-makers who ran comprehensive firms which included other crafts besides cabinet-making and upholstery. Cabinet-making and upholstery together were not enough to produce a wide variety of finished goods. Cabinet-makers produced only carcass furniture; other craftsmen, such as carvers or gilders, were necessary to decorate it. Upholsterers did not themselves make any complete items of furniture although they made and finished furnishing items such as cushions and window and bed curtains. Chair-makers and bedstead-makers were needed to supply the frames which they then covered or draped. The comprehensive firms of the second half of the eighteenth century, therefore, aimed to cover all these crafts.

A General Description of All Trades, 1747, discussed the various aspects of furniture-making as clearly differentiated crafts, as did Robert Campbell's London Tradesmen, published in the same year. Campbell also described how the upholsterer had developed into an entrepreneur, selling a variety of items necessary to furnish a home¹⁵. It is not clear from Campbell's evidence, however, whether or not the upholsterer he discussed directly employed any of the furniture-makers whose products he sold. When discussing the master cabinet-maker, Campbell pointed out that this furniture-maker found his profit considerably diminished when he sold his goods through an upholsterer¹⁶. Profit was the motive which led such cabinet-makers and other furniture-makers to expand their businesses into general furniture-making concerns.

Campbell's emphasis on the upholsterer as the main entrepreneurial figure is misleading because it ignores the important role played by others, particularly cabinet-makers and carvers, in the development of comprehensive

manufacturing firms. Indeed, the majority of the leading West End firms which were established by a single craftsman-entrepreneur in the second half of the eighteenth century, were set up by cabinet-makers and carvers. Whatever their own craft training or the original basis of their firm, the entrepreneurs who wanted to make a financial success of their venture all had the same aim: they set out to establish comprehensive manufacturing firms, thereby securing for themselves the profits made in each area of furniture manufacture.

Perhaps the most unusual furniture-making entrepreneurs were the small group of upholsterers who worked in Soho and supplied tapestry, designed and manufactured under their supervision, as a regular part of their business¹⁷. They specialised in the production of tapestry-covered furniture, often with carved and gilt frames, and certain of them expanded into general furniture-making in the 1740s and 50s at the same time as did firms based on other craft skills. William Bradshaw was one of the leading Soho upholsterer/tapestry-makers in the first half of the eighteenth century. His firm was well-known for its tapestries and tapestry-covered furniture in the 1730s and, from the 1740s if not earlier, cabinet work was also undertaken¹⁸. His workshops were taken over in 1755 by a relative, George Smith Bradshaw, and Paul Saunders, both of whom may have been in partnership with him before that date¹⁹.

G. S. Bradshaw and Saunders called themselves cabinet-makers and upholsterers, indicating that they ran a general furniture-making firm at the same time as specialising in tapestry²⁰. Saunders received the royal appointments of yeoman arras-worker and yeoman tapestry taylor in 1759 and 1761 respectively²¹. His workshops, known as 'The Royal Tapestry Manufactory' contained a special 'tapestry room'²². Tapestry work fitted in well with Saunders' training in the 'soft' side of the furniture trade since it was used to upholster chairs which were probably made on his premises²³.

Bedsteads were made there, the hangings cut and sewn by the firms's upholsterers²⁴ while gilders, working in the silvering and gilding rooms, put the finishing touches to many of the items²⁵. The firm of Linnell had a separate gilding room in the 1760s²⁶ and it and others produced individual items of silvered furniture²⁷ but only Saunders is known to have had a room set aside for silvering furniture.

The Soho upholsterer/tapestry-makers were not the only upholsterers to expand into general furniture-making. The three leading upholsterers of the third quarter of the eighteenth century, John Cobb, William France and John Mayhew, played an important part in developing relatively large scale capitalist enterprises in the furniture trade, but they did so in conjunction with partners who were cabinet-makers. Such partnerships not only provided extra capital with which to launch a firm but the craft knowledge of the partners covered the two main areas of production in any comprehensive furniture-making firm.

The firm established by John Cobb and William Vile was one of the most successful of the 1750s and 60s²⁸. Cobb, the upholsterer, however, was by no means the dominant partner. Vile, the cabinet-maker, had the experience of working for William Hallett behind him²⁹ and the royal commissions for both cabinet-making and upholstery were awarded to the firm on the basis of Vile's reputation³⁰. Not surprisingly, cabinet-making and upholstery were the main concerns of the firm which also specialised in high quality carving, employing its own carvers from the early 1760s, if not earlier³¹. The firm established by William France, upholsterer, and John Bradburn, cabinet-maker³², was probably modelled on that of Vile and Cobb, for whom both men worked³³ until they set up on their own about 1764³⁴. It was able to take over the supply of furniture to the royal household after Vile and Cobb were discharged in that year and, indeed, was probably set up in order to do so³⁵. Like Vile and Cobb, the firm

combined cabinet-making and upholstery and also specialised in high quality carving³⁶.

The other notable comprehensive manufacturing firm headed jointly by an upholsterer and a cabinet-maker was that established by John Mayhew and William Ince. The former was apprenticed to a Mr. Bradshaw, upholsterer, who was almost certainly the William Bradshaw of Soho discussed above³⁷, while Ince trained as a cabinet-maker with the eminent John West³⁸. The young partners leased the former premises of Charles Smith, which had housed a cabinet-making and upholstery business, and also took over part of his stock³⁹. This gave them an excellent start when the firm opened in January 1759⁴⁰. The craft knowledge of each partner was utilised: Mayhew supervised the upholstery section of the firm while Ince supervised the cabinet-making side⁴¹. It was Mayhew, however, who assumed overall managerial control within the firm. Ince abandoned his entrepreneurial role to concentrate on design, leaving Mayhew in overall charge of the day-to-day running of one of the pre-eminent firms of the second half of the eighteenth century⁴².

Not only were cabinet-makers prominent in the above firms but some also established comprehensive firms on their own. Benjamin Goodison (fl.c.1727-67), for instance, was a cabinet-maker yet his firm specialised not only in cabinet work but also in carving and gilding⁴³. There is no evidence, however, that it covered upholstery by the mid-eighteenth century as did the firm of Hallett⁴⁴. Hallett was established in London by the early 1730s and specialised in very high quality cabinet work⁴⁵. His firm also supplied seat furniture such as the suite of eighteen chairs and two settees made in 1735 for Lord Irwin's house in Grosvenor Square⁴⁶. This suite was upholstered by a different firm which submitted a separate account, indicating that Hallett probably did not employ his own upholsterers at that date⁴⁷. By mid-century, however, the firm covered

the 'soft' side of furniture-making because by then Hallett called himself 'cabinet-maker and upholsterer'⁴⁸. Furthermore, in the 1750s, he employed at least one journeyman carver and gilder as well as an apprentice to that craft⁴⁹, thus covering the main areas of furniture-making.

If the example of the extremely successful firm run by William Hallett, who was able to retire to a country estate⁵⁰, is not sufficient to illustrate how mistaken was Campbell's emphasis on the entrepreneurial role of the upholsterer, then the firm run by another cabinet-maker, George Seddon, confirms the significant part played by cabinet-makers in developing the comprehensive firm. Seddon trained as a cabinet-maker in London, completing his apprenticeship in 1749⁵¹. He had established his own business in Aldersgate Street, Clerkenwell, where land was cheaper than in the West End, by 1754 when he took his first apprentice⁵². By the 1780s, his premises, staff and stock were greater than those of any contemporary working in London⁵³. In this the firm was atypical but it was typical in that the comprehensive nature of the undertaking was identical to that aimed at by the leading West End furniture-making entrepreneurs.

Although Seddon was recorded in Mortimer's Universal Director of 1763, it did not give him any particular mention as it did others such as Chippendale. By 1768, when his premises were destroyed by fire, however, he was described as 'one of the most eminent cabinet-makers of London', employing about eighty people⁵⁴. The large workforce suggests that a variety of crafts were carried out by that date. The firm started off as a cabinet-making concern but George Seddon took care that upholstery was developed. His son George (1765-1815, and hereafter referred to as George Seddon II) was apprenticed in 1777 as an upholsterer within the family firm and presumably trained by upholsterers already working therein⁵⁵. It is not until 1786, however, when a German visitor recorded details of a visit to the firm, that there is confirmation that Seddon worked as

comprehensively as the leading West End firms⁵⁶.

Sophie Von La Roche recorded that joiners, carvers, gilders and upholsterers worked for the firm⁵⁷ and it can be safely assumed that so too did cabinet-makers and chair-makers since cabinet and chair work represented a large proportion of the firm's output⁵⁸. So comprehensive was the firm that Von La Roche commented that every stage in the production process was carried out within the Aldersgate Street workshops: 'the entire story of the wood, as used for both inexpensive and costly furniture and the method of treating it, can be traced in this establishment'⁵⁹.

One of the leading West End comprehensive furniture-making firms of the second half of the eighteenth century was that established by Thomas Chippendale. He was not trained in any of the main furniture-making crafts, however, but as a joiner in the provinces⁶⁰. In the 1730s and 40s, provincial joiners turned their hand to furniture-making and, because the division of labour was less intense there than in the capital, Chippendale probably learned skills that in London would have been taught only to apprentice cabinet-makers. Whatever the case, he had a knowledge of woodworking when he set up in the capital in the late 1740s⁶¹. However, it was not until an injection of capital into the firm, resulting from his partnership with James Rannie in 1754, and the publication in the same year of his Director, which announced his abilities as a designer, that the business expanded⁶².

Rannie's money enabled the firm to undertake upholstery as well as cabinet-work and the firm's upholstery workshops were probably constructed in 1756 shortly after the partnership⁶³. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that carving and gilding were not carried out within the firm in the 1750s and 60s when such work was not only popular but work of high quality was frequently supplied by the firm⁶⁴. A plan of the firm's premises in 1803 indicates cabinet-making, veneering, chair-making and

upholstery shops as well as rooms for carpets, glass and feathers⁶⁵.

There were no carving or gilding rooms such as those in the Linnell workshops in 1763⁶⁶. The absence of such shops in the early nineteenth century when the craft of carving was almost obsolete, however, should not be taken to indicate that the firm of Chippendale did not execute carved and gilt work on its own premises forty or fifty years earlier.

The importance of carvers in developing the comprehensive firm, particularly in the years before 1760, has been underestimated. The firms run by William Linnell and the partners James Whittle and Samuel Norman provide the best examples of craft-trained carvers becoming manufacturers of a wide variety of furniture. William Linnell served his time as a carver between 1717 and 1724 and set up his own workshop about 1729 or 1730⁶⁷. By 1739 the firm supplied a limited range of cabinet goods as well as specialising in carved and gilt work⁶⁸. A decade later, the firm supplied a wide variety of cabinet and seat furniture⁶⁹. One client referred to William Linnell in 1747 as a 'carver and cabinet-maker', confirming the scope of the firm⁷⁰. Upholstery work was undertaken in the late 1740s⁷¹ and, when John Linnell joined his father in the business in 1750, it already covered the main areas of furniture-making⁷². His father built up the comprehensive firm and John's talents as a designer enhanced its reputation.

The business was based firmly on William Linnell's own craft of carving, to which his son John was probably also trained⁷³, and the carver's shop remained the hub of the firm in the 1750s and 60s when a wide variety of goods was produced⁷⁴. The comprehensive nature of the firm is best seen in the inventory of the workshops, complete with stock, materials and tools, taken in 1763 after the death of William Linnell⁷⁵. There were cabinet, chair, joinery, upholstery, carving and gilding shops and the turner's tools in the chair room and cupboard in the cabinet shop

indicate that turning was also executed. Besides this, the firm had a glass room, which was mainly used for storing mirror glass. Most of the textiles were stored in the main upholstery shop together with quilts, blankets, fringes, lines and tassels. Cutting and sewing were done in this shop where bed-furniture, window curtains, seat cases and other items were made up. Carpets were cut, sewn, cleaned, repaired and stored in the second or 'middle' upholstery shop while feathers were dried and purified and mattresses, bolsters, pillows and cushions were stuffed in the third upholstery shop known as the 'feather garret'.⁷⁶

It took about twenty years for William Linnell's firm to develop into a comprehensive furniture-making concern and it was a similar length of time before the firm founded by James Whittle about 1734 also moved into general furniture-making. Whittle's firm originally concentrated on carving and gilding, Whittle's own craft and that of his son who was taken into partnership from 1752 until his death in 1755⁷⁷. Soon after the death of his son, James Whittle went into partnership with his son-in-law, Samuel Norman, also a carver and gilder. Norman had previously run his own carving and gilding firm, established with money loaned by his uncle, William Hallett⁷⁸, soon after he completed his apprenticeship in 1753. The new partners must have been conscious of the profit to be made from a comprehensive furniture-manufacturing enterprise such as that run by Hallett but it was not until 1758 that they expanded into cabinet-making and upholstery⁷⁹.

John Mayhew, the upholsterer discussed above, was taken into partnership in 1758 at the time of the expansion⁸⁰, which suggests that he was brought in for his expertise on the 'soft' side of the trade. Suitable premises were obtained when the three men took over those of the late John West in King Street, Covent Garden, which had housed a cabinet-making and upholstery business, and a press announcement stated that cabinet-making,

upholstery, carving and gilding would be carried out there⁸¹. Mayhew's association with the firm was short-lived, however, and James Whittle died in early December 1759, just before the premises were destroyed by fire later in the month. Norman was left without partners or premises but, because the arrangements laid down in Whittle's will allowed Norman to retain charge of all the stock, goods-in-trade and debts due to the partnership, he was able to take temporary premises and continue in business⁸². In June 1760, Norman moved into more permanent premises in Soho Square, formerly occupied by Paul Saunders⁸³. The speciality of Norman's firm was always its carving and gilding, but immediately after moving to Soho Square, Norman was able to undertake cabinet-making and upholstery as well as carving and gilding. He was able to do so despite having no cabinet work on hand because he entered into an agreement with Saunders whereby for one year Saunders' orders were made up by Norman who had use of Saunders' wrought stock and raw materials⁸⁴. This business arrangement proved advantageous to Norman. It enabled him to get back on his feet and re-establish his firm on a comprehensive basis.

The leading comprehensive furniture-making firms of the eighteenth century were established by men, either individually or in partnership, with backgrounds in a variety of furniture-making crafts. These craftsmen-entrepreneurs had some knowledge of furniture-making. They also had a common objective - the expansion of their firms to include the major areas of furniture-making. By the end of the eighteenth century, the inclusion within one firm of the main furniture-making crafts was the established mode of production in the quality trade and remained so until the 1870s. Although firms grew in size in the nineteenth century, the leading ones, such as Gillow, Elliott, Seddon, Holland and Jackson and Graham, were all organised in this way.

Among the 'chief makers and sellers' of furniture in early

nineteenth century London were Gillow, Elliott and Oakley⁸⁵. The Oxford Street firm of Gillow was established in 1769 by William Taylor, cabinet-maker, and Thomas Gillow, cabinet-maker and relative of the Gillow family which ran the Lancaster furniture-making business of that name. Gillow and Taylor was probably organised as a comprehensive manufacturing unit from the outset because the partners were known as cabinet-makers and upholsterers⁸⁶. The Lancaster firm of Gillow took control through partnership in the 1770s but, unfortunately, there are no records relating to the London branch until the early nineteenth century, by which time all the main areas of furniture production were carried out within the firm⁸⁷. To this extent it was typical of the West End comprehensive firm but the furniture it sold was not all made in the London workshops. Some of it was made in Lancaster⁸⁸. This allowed the firm to keep down prices without buying in from middlemen or small masters in a way that was not open to other West End firms. It meant, however, that Gillow of Oxford Street was not typical of the type of comprehensive manufacturing unit which developed in the capital. The other firms manufactured in their London workshops all the furniture displayed and sold in their showrooms.

Elliott of New Bond Street achieved prominence mainly through the royal commission held by Charles Elliott from 1784 to 1827⁸⁹. He completed his apprenticeship as an upholsterer with Paul Saunders and therefore was familiar with the various areas of production undertaken by his master⁹⁰. In 1774, he set up in business with a partner called Davis, whose craft background is not known, but was on his own before he began to work for the Lord Chamberlain's Office in 1784⁹¹. The work for the royal household reveals a firm prepared to undertake almost any task asked of it, from cleaning and doing odd-jobs to supplying furniture for use in government offices as well as by the royal family⁹². There is no reason to assume that such a financially sound and long-lived firm as that run by Elliott

did not directly employ workers from all the main furniture-making crafts.

Although the firm of Oakley did not have such a 'far-reaching business' as that of its two main rivals, it nevertheless offered a wide selection of goods that were considered amongst the most tasteful in the capital⁹³. George Oakley was trained as an upholsterer⁹⁴ and set up on his own about 1786. In the 1800s, the firm was known as Oakley, Shackleton and Evans. The background of John Evans is not known but Thomas Shackleton was also an upholsterer. He took to his partnership with Oakley a knowledge of the largest comprehensive furniture-making firm in London at that time, that run by his father-in-law, George Seddon, with whom he had briefly been in partnership⁹⁵. In the early nineteenth century, it was Oakley rather than Seddon which was regarded as the epitome of the 'omnicompetent' firm⁹⁶.

The comprehensive manufacturing firm which produced a wide range of goods continued to dominate the quality trade until the 1870s. The records of the firm of Holland show that, from the 1830s at least, it embraced all the major areas of furniture production⁹⁷ and, by mid-century, it was one of the largest concerns in the capital⁹⁸. It was rivalled by Jackson and Graham of Oxford Street which, in 1856, was organised into separate departments which covered cabinet-making, chair-making, carving, gilding and upholstery⁹⁹. Twenty years later, when J. H. Pollen described the leading large-scale West End furniture-making firms such as Gillow, Holland, Howard, Collinson and Lock, Morant, Wright and Mansfield and Jackson and Graham, he chose the latter for a detailed description of a typical firm¹⁰⁰. He emphasised that all the firms made their own goods on their own premises and consequently employed a large number of workers. He commented on the great variety of craftsmen brought together for furniture-making and concluded that it was 'the variety and comprehensiveness of these operations' that made them such profitable concerns¹⁰¹.

While the hall-mark of the comprehensive furniture-making firms

was the production of a wide variety of furniture within the firm, there is some evidence that the firm of Seddon expanded beyond furniture production and manufactured glass and ornamental mounts for furniture. Sophie Von La Roche, who visited the firm in 1786, recorded that Seddon employed metal workers - 'girdlers - who mould the bronze into graceful patterns'¹⁰². No reference was made to plainer, more standard items such as back-plates, handles and hinges which, in the early nineteenth century, the firm is known to have bought from brass-founders¹⁰³, as did most furniture-makers throughout the years 1700 to 1870. Von La Roche, however, is the only source which states that metal workers were directly employed by George Seddon. Furthermore, the firm was atypical because of its location outside the West End and, more importantly, the scale on which it operated. Nevertheless, Christopher Gilbert has raised the possibility that some of the metalwork supplied by the firm of Chippendale was produced internally. There is no evidence for this before 1774 and that cited by Gilbert is highly speculative¹⁰⁴. Brass-founders supplied the needs of furniture-makers throughout the period of study and there is no evidence to suggest that any West End comprehensive furniture-making firm strayed outside the boundaries of furniture production into production of metal mounts.

R. W. Symonds argued that the making as well as the selling of looking-glasses became the prerogative of the furniture-maker after 1720¹⁰⁵. He probably based his case on John Gumley, whose connection with glass production has already been discussed¹⁰⁶ but Gumley was an exception rather than the rule. Von La Roche reported in 1786 that 'mirrors were cast and cut' in Seddon's workshops¹⁰⁷. It is possible that she mistook finishing processes for manufacturing ones but the Seddon family are known to have had connections with the British Plate Glass Company of Ravenhead, St. Helens¹⁰⁸ and owed money to a glass company in 1804¹⁰⁹. A bill-head referring to the firm of Seddon as manufacturers of British Plate Glass cannot be taken

as confirmation of their manufacturing role, however, because Ince and Mayhew were similarly described and there is no evidence that the latter had anything more than a commercial interest in a glass company and sold glass as part of their business¹¹⁰. The evidence is by no means conclusive but, even if glass production had been carried out on Seddon's premises, it would probably have been organised separately from furniture-making because two different firms were involved. Furniture-making was exclusively in the hands of the Seddon family which had only a partial interest in the glass manufacturing concern.

Furniture-makers obtained their glass from glass-grinders whose job it was to grind, silver and polish it¹¹¹. Certain comprehensive furniture-making firms had glass rooms and, because new glass was extremely expensive, offered a service whereby old glass was cut, re-silvered and then used in new pieces of furniture¹¹². John Mayhew, Thomas Chippendale, John Linnell and other entrepreneurs imported foreign glass, which was superior in quality to the domestic product¹¹³, but there is no evidence that any of them employed journeymen glass-grinders and made their own glass. Indeed, John Linnell had dealings with several glass-grinders as did other similar firms¹¹⁴.

With the possible exception of Seddon, the manufacture of glass and furniture were not undertaken within one firm until certain specialist looking-glass and frame-making firms transformed themselves into furniture-making firms in the years between 1850 and 1870. Looking-glasses were popular in the late 1840s and 50s after improved methods of manufacture and the repeal of duty on mirror-glass in 1845 dramatically reduced the costs of mirror production¹¹⁵. Even the largest furniture-making firms would not compete with the large looking-glass firms such as those run by Charles Nosotti in Oxford Street and George Sims in Aldersgate Street. They manufactured their own glass (Sims silvered more than eleven acres of glass each year in the

mid-1860s) and also made the looking-glass frames¹¹⁶.

Just as firms which specialised in carved frames in the mid-eighteenth century expanded into general furniture-making, so too did the large looking-glass manufactories a century later¹¹⁷. Nosotti called himself a carver and gilder. He was probably craft-trained in Milan, from whence he hailed, and settled in England some time before the birth of his son, also to become a carver and gilder, in Westminster in 1831¹¹⁸. His firm was known as a 'looking-glass and frame manufactory' and also produced a wide variety of furniture, including a high quality cabinet made for the Countess Waldegrave for Strawberry Hill and shown at the 1862 Exhibition¹¹⁹. The firm also pioneered new upholstery styles¹²⁰, indicating that both the 'hard' and 'soft' sides of the furniture trade were represented within the firm. Sims, in contrast to Nosotti, had no connection with furniture-making, having started out silvering mirrors in the glass trade in 1818¹²¹. His firm expanded into glass production and, about 1850, into frame-making and gilding. In the 1860s, it made several different kinds of furniture, including cabinets¹²².

Another process often assumed to have been carried out by furniture-making firms is japanning¹²³. Japanning, however, was put out to specialist japanners, many of whom lived and worked in or near furniture-making areas¹²⁴. Chair manufactories which, from the later decades of the eighteenth century, specialised in 'fancy' chairs employed japanners and painters¹²⁵ but it should be remembered that at that date much of what passed for japanning was often little more than paint work finished with varnish¹²⁶. French-polishing, a process which was not used until the early nineteenth century, was taken into the comprehensive firm as soon as there was sufficient work on a regular basis to warrant the employment of journeymen polishers¹²⁷. The major firms all employed french-polishers in the second half of the nineteenth century¹²⁸.

At the same time as the furniture-making entrepreneurs gathered together the various crafts necessary to make complete items of furniture, they also bought in items such as carpets, floor cloths and window blinds in order to offer their clients a comprehensive furnishing service¹²⁹. Some went further and offered advice on interior decoration. Architects and furniture-makers, particularly those who were also designers, were consulted on such matters by their richer patrons throughout the period. Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, for instance, sought the advice of James Moore, who, with his partner John Gumley, offered one of the widest selections of furniture in London in the early eighteenth century, on the interior room arrangements at Blenheim Palace in the years between 1714 and 1724¹³⁰.

The extent to which furniture-makers were consulted about interior decoration and furnishings, however, increased with the growth of the comprehensive firm which could supply the items recommended and also with the growth of the middle class market. In 1747, Robert Campbell differentiated the craftsman-upholsterer from a different kind of upholsterer whom he described as one who 'by degrees, has crept over his head, and set up as a connoisseur in every article that belongs to a house'¹³¹. It was in order to avoid confusion between the craftsman-upholsterer and the loose use of the term to cover those furniture-makers who set themselves up as connoisseurs in all matters pertaining to the decoration and furnishing of houses that the term 'interior decoration' began to be used in the early nineteenth century¹³².

Of the 'upholsterer' interior decorator, Campbell stated that 'He is the man upon whose judgement I rely in the choice of goods, and I suppose he has not only judgement in the materials, but taste in the fashions, and skill in the workmanship'¹³³. There were others who were not furniture-makers, however, who considered themselves 'pretty' connoisseurs in matters of furniture and decoration and the conflicting advice given to

Lord Melbourne by Thomas Chippendale, his furniture-maker, and William Chambers, his architect, is well documented¹³⁴. Both Thomas Chippendale and John Linnell were consulted on matters of interior decoration as well as, and sometimes in preference to, architects, but they were well-known designers in their own right¹³⁵.

The growth of a market composed of clients who were neither self-confident in matters of taste nor wealthy enough to seek the advice of an architect concerning the decoration of their home increased the numbers who relied on the furniture-maker. The 'upholsterer' decorator was the product of the commercial, financial and industrial 'revolutions' which had created a large and wealthy bourgeoisie in Britain. As such, it was a unique feature and the envy of the European bourgeoisie¹³⁶. A not unsympathetic account of the nouveaux riches, unconfident in matters of taste yet anxious to have their houses in keeping with their recently elevated status, was given by the foreign journalist who, in 1800, discussed their dependence on the 'upholsterer' to save them from embarrassing mistakes when furnishing their homes¹³⁷. This mentor in matters of taste could tell at a glance from the house and the clients which furnishings would be appropriate.

The 'upholsterer' was described thus: 'As if worked by strings, he tells one immediately what colours go together, how much each article costs, what one must choose in order to guard against the shape and style becoming old-fashioned after some years, what changes must be made in a house, what sort of carpets to go in the dining-room and what sort in the dressing-room, what materials last longest; how much time he needs to furnish the whole house and so on and so on'¹³⁸. Such an absolute arbiter of taste appeared in literature as Mr. Soho, the 'first architectural upholsterer of the age', wittily described by Maria Edgeworth in The Absentee, 1812. He decreed that 'the whole face of things must be changed'¹³⁹. Not

all changes were carried out tastefully or conscientiously, however, and John Ruskin bitterly regretted giving the furniture-making firm of Snell of Albemarle Street £2,000 and carte blanche to decorate and furnish a house in the 1850s. Effie Ruskin declared that Snell had done it as cheaply and vulgarly as possible and pocketed half of the money¹⁴⁰. Despite this experience, the Ruskins continued to use the services of the 'upholsterer' interior decorator as did many others. So great was the demand for the services offered that by the mid-nineteenth century leading firms such as Jackson and Graham had a separate department to deal with interior decoration¹⁴¹.

The comprehensive furniture-making firm has been so designated in this thesis because of the comprehensiveness of production carried out therein. It was also characterised by the sale therein of a variety of other furnishing items, such as carpets, which it did not manufacture. Together with the interior decoration service went a host of others, including undertaking, appraising and house-letting, which can only be categorised as being in some way or other connected with the furniture, furnishings or upkeep of a house¹⁴². Not every firm undertook all of these ancillary services but, if a client requested something, they tried to oblige. These services, however, were not essential to the comprehensive manufacturing firm as such. That was based on the bringing together of the main furniture-making crafts in order to produce furniture more rationally and profitably.

The all-embracing nature of furniture-making within the comprehensive firms was remarkable. It was unknown elsewhere in the world, even in Paris¹⁴³. In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, such firms came under increasing threat from the 'linen-draperies'. These were firms, such as Maple of Tottenham Court Road, which sold under their own name a great deal of furniture made in the cheap trade¹⁴⁴. They undercut West End firms which employed highly skilled craftsmen. George Edmund Holland, of the firm of Holland, stated that from the 1850s and 60s, West End firms were forced to

use inferior materials to keep prices down¹⁴⁵. By and large, the main West End firms managed to maintain their standards of work and the size of their workforce until the 1870s when the competition from the cheap trade heralded the demise of the comprehensive manufacturing firm.

In 1875, for instance, Jackson and Graham cut the wages of their craftsmen in an attempt to compete with the 'cheap houses' which could undersell them in most goods¹⁴⁶. Skilled workers not only found their rates of pay undermined but many lost their jobs as the workforces of the comprehensive firms declined in size in the late 1870s and 1880s¹⁴⁷. Holland complained that even the Office of Works was prepared to accept goods produced by 'sweated' labour in order to buy goods cheaply¹⁴⁸. Work was put out to firms in East or North London rather than made on the premises of the comprehensive manufacturing firms. By the late 1880s, entrepreneurs and craftsmen alike found it difficult to name any firm which manufactured all its own furniture¹⁴⁹. In evidence given to the Royal Commission on the Sweating System, John Maple M.P., head of the firm of Maple, expressed approval of the system of sub-contracting, low wages and sub-divided labour which brought cheaper furniture to the customer. Representatives of firms such as Holland and Gillow, which, in earlier years had epitomised the West End comprehensive manufacturing firm, however, recalled better times when their firms manufactured all the furniture that they sold¹⁵⁰.

Footnotes

- 1 Henry Mayhew, 'Of The Furniture Workers', Letter LXIII, Morning Chronicle 1 Aug 1850
- 2 Of the master cabinet-makers recorded in LFM in the years 1700-1750, the majority ran firms that were concerned only with cabinet-making.
- 3 Anon., A General Description of All Trades, 1747, pp. 57-8 and Joseph Collyer, The Parent's and Guardian's Directory, 1761, p. 96
- 4 Simon Jervis, 'Giles Grendey (1693-1780)', Country Life, 6 June 1974, pp. 1418-9
- 5 LFM, p. 6 illustrates Belchier's trade card
- 6 ibid., p. 44
- 7 R.W. Symonds, 'Gerrit Jensen, Cabinet-Maker To The Royal Household', Connoisseur, May 1935, p. 268
- 8 Geoffrey Beard, 'Three eighteenth-century cabinet-makers, Moore, Goodison and Vile', The Burlington Magazine, July 1977, p. 479 and GCM, p. 39
- 9 Beard, op. cit., p. 479
- 10 R.W. Symonds, Masterpieces of English Furniture and Clocks, 1940, pp. 60 + 67 and LFM, p. 7
- 11 LFM, pp. 29, 54 + 57
- 12 A General Description of All Trades, p. 58
- 13 Collyer, Directory, p. 96
- 14 ibid., p. 96
- 15 R. Campbell, London Tradesmen, 1747, p. 170
- 16 ibid., p. 171
- 17 Francis Sheppard, ed. Survey of London, The Parish of St. Anne, Soho, 1966 vol. XXXIV, Appendix 1
- 18 ibid., pp. 517-8
- 19 ibid., p. 518
- 20 GCM, p. 51
- 21 Survey of London, XXXIV, p. 519
- 22 P.A. Kirkham, 'Samuel Norman: a study of an eighteenth-century Craftsman', The Burlington Magazine, Aug 1969, p. 506
- 23 ibid., p. 506

- 24 ibid., p. 506
- 25 ibid., p. 510
- 26 Helena Hayward and Pat Kirkham, William and John Linnell. Eighteenth Century London Furniture Makers, 1980, vol. 1, p. 49
- 27 ibid., p. 49; see also PRO C 104/46 pt. 1 (James Cullen). For a general discussion of the silvering of furniture see R.W. Symonds, Furniture Making in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century England, 1955, pp. 145-153
- 28 Geoffrey Beard, 'William Vile Again', Furniture History, vol. XI, 1975, p. 114 and GCM, pp. 51-6
- 29 Beard, op. cit., p. 114
- 30 R.W. Symonds, 'Three London Craftsmen', Connoisseur, Apl. 1938, p. 183. This remains the clearest exposition of the partnership.
- 31 Anthony Coleridge, Chippendale Furniture, 1968, p. 33
- 32 PRO IR 1/25 + 26 and LC 5/105. see also Anthony Coleridge, 'Some Rococo Cabinet-Makers and Sir Lawrence Dundas', Apollo, Sep 1967, pp. 214-25
- 33 PRO LC 9/214
- 34 PRO LC 9/21 + LC 5/57
- 35 ibid.
- 36 see PRO LC 9/294 and GCM, p. 61
- 37 Public Advertiser, 25 Jan 1759. William Bradshaw of Soho was the only one of several furniture-makers named Bradshaw whose reputation was sufficiently great in 1759 for him to be referred to as Mr. Bradshaw in the knowledge that contemporaries would recognise the particular person.
- 38 PRO IR 1/19
- 39 Public Advertiser, 25 Jan 1759
- 40 ibid.
- 41 Pat Kirkham, 'The Partnership of William Ince and John Mayhew 1759-1804' Furniture History, vol. X, 1971, pp. 58-9
- 42 ibid., pp. 58-9
- 43 GCM, pp. 44-7 and Beard, 'Three eighteenth-century cabinet-makers', pp. 183-!
- 44 L.O.J. Boynton, 'William Hallett', in 'Shorter Notices', Furniture History, vol. II, 1966, p. 46

- 45 GCM, pp. 49-50
- 46 Christopher Gilbert, 'The Temple Newsam Furniture Bills', Furniture History, vol. III, 1967. p. 18
- 47 ibid., p. 18
- 48 Boynton, 'Hallett', p. 46
- 49 Edward Edwards, 'An Account Of The Life of Mr. Edwards', pp. i-ii in Anecdotes of Painters, 1808
- 50 see pp. 168-9
- 51 GL. JCR, Bindings, vol. 6, Sep 1742
- 52 ibid., Aug 1764
- 53 see p. 145
- 54 Annual Register, July 1768
- 55 GL. JCR, Bindings, vol. 7, Sep. 1777
- 56 M.S. Von La Roche, 'Tagebuch eine Reise durch Holland und England', translated by Clare Williams as Sophie in London (1786), 1933, pp. 173-5
- 57 ibid., p. 173
- 58 GCM, pp. 79-8 and G. Bernard Hughes, 'George Seddon Of London House' Apollo, May 1957, pp. 177-181
- 59 Williams, Sophie in London, p. 175
- 60 Christopher Gilbert, The Life and Work of Thomas Chippendale, 1978, vol. 1, pp. 3 + 5
- 61 ibid., p. 8
- 62 ibid., p. 9
- 63 ibid., pp. 11, 12 + 22
- 64 ibid., pp. 43-4
- 65 ibid., p. 23
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- 68 ibid., pp. 17-20
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- 72 ibid., pp. 4 + 16-20
- 73 ibid., pp. 2-3
- 74 ibid., pp. 19, 20 + 49
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- 76 ibid., pp. 45-53 and Appendix III
- 77 Kirkham, 'Norman', p. 501
- 78 ibid., p. 501
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- 82 Kirkham, 'Norman', p. 502
- 83 ibid., Appendix I
- 84 ibid., p. 503
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- 86 Kent's Directory, 1771
- 87 I am grateful to Dr. L.O.J. Boynton for this information
- 88 ibid.
- 89 Nicholas Barton, 'Rise of a Royal Furniture-Maker', I and II, Country Life, 10 Feb 1966, pp. 293-5 and 17 Feb 1966, pp. 360-2, resp.
- 90 GL, UCR, Bindings, Sep 1770. see Karin-M. Walton, 'The Worshipful Company of Upholders of the City of London', Furniture History, vol. IX, 1973, p. 51
- 91 Barton, op. cit., I, p. 293
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- 99 M.D. Wyatt, 'On Furniture and Decoration', Reports On The Paris Universal Exhibition, 1856, Part 1, p. 308
- 100 J.H. Pollen, 'Furniture and Woodwork', in G.B. Bevan, ed. British Manufacturing Industries, 1876, p. 136
- 101 ibid., p. 155
- 102 Williams, Sophie in London, p. 173. The terms translated as metal-worker by Clare Williams are discussed in Ralph Edwards, 'A Great Georgian Cabinet-Maker. New Light On The Firm of Seddon', Country Life, 21 Oct 1933, p. 416
- 103 PRO B 3/4464
- 104 Gilbert, Chippendale, vol. 1, pp. 45 + 60, n.27
- 105 R.W. Symonds, 'English Looking-Glass Plates and their Manufacture - iii', Connoisseur, May 1936, p. 12
- 106 see p. 109
- 107 Williams, Sophie in London, p. 174
- 108 G. Bernard Hughes, 'George Seddon of London House', Apollo, May 1957, p. 179
- 109 PRO B 3/4464, 'Tradesmens Accounts and Sundry Expenses completing Work in Hand'
- 110 Ince and Mayhew lent £100 to The Plate Glass Company in 1782, PRO C12 623/44. They were also described as dealers in glass in 1780, Kent's Directory. see Geoffrey Wills, English Looking-glasses. A Study of the Glass, names and Makers (1670-1820), 1965, pp. 132-153
- 111 Campbell, London Tradesmen, pp. 172-3, Collyer, Directory, p. 149 and The Universal Director, 1763, p. 39
- 112 Hayward and Kirkham, Linnell, vol. 1, p. 53 and Gilbert, Chippendale, vol. 1, p. 44. There are no known reference to mercury baths (into which glass was dipped for silvering) in furniture workshops, or to the people who worked therein suffering from shaking and other afflictions of the nervous system caused by mercury oxidisation.
- 113 ibid., pp. 53 and 44 resp.
- 114 Hayward and Kirkham, Linnell, vol. 1., p. 53 and PRO B 3/43, 274 + 5245
- 115 see pp. 228-9

- 116 Henry Mayhew, ed. The Shops and Companies of London, 1865, pp. 203 and 230 resp.
- 117 ibid., pp. 203 and 230 resp.
- 118 PRO HO 107 1851, 1510.1.5
- 119 The Art Journal. Illustrated Catalogue of the International Exhibition 1862, 1862, p. 310
- 120 PP. 1888 (13) vol. XX, Sweating System, p. 212 states that Nosotti introduced 'French' work, an upholstery technique described in Pollen, 'Furniture and Woodwork', p. 184
- 121 Mayhew, ed. Shops and Companies, p. 230 and Furniture Gazette, 4 July 1874, p. 676
- 122 ibid.
- 123 R.W. Symonds, for instance, stated that the large furniture-making establishments would have employed journeymen japanners. Symonds, Masterpeices, p. 78
- 124 Hayward and Kirkham, Linnell, vol. 1, p. 49; PRO B 1/106 and B 3/4464, 3500, 4073, 1421, 2012 + 504
- 125 PRO C 13/14 pt. II
- 126 see p. 62
- 127 F. Hervé, French Polishers and their Industry, 1897, p. 38
- 128 Pollen, 'Furniture and Woodwork', pp. 139-140
- 129 see PRO B 3/4464, 43, 5243, 3021, 504, 4073, 2083 + 1760
- 130 Beard, 'Three eighteenth-century cabinet-makers', p. 480
- 131 Campbell, London Tradesmen, pp. 169-70
- 132 Clifford Musgrave, preface to Thomas Hope, Household Furniture And Interior Decoration Executed From Designs By Thomas Hope, 1807, reprinted 1970, p. 7
- 133 Campbell, op. cit., pp. 169-70
- 134 Gilbert, Chippendale, vol. 1, pp. 260-2
- 135 ibid., pp. 47-8 and Hayward and Kirkham, Linnell, vol. 1, p. 68 resp.
- 136 London und Paris, vol. VI, 1800, pp. 184-7
- 137 ibid., p. 185
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- 139 Maria Edgeworth, The Absentee, Everyman ed., 1968, p. 94
- 140 Simon Jervis, 'Ruskin and Furniture', Furniture History, vol. IX, 1973, p. 99
- 141 Wyatt, 'On Furniture and Decoration', p. 308
- 142 Hayward and Kirkham, Linnell, vol. 1, pp. 16-26 and Gilbert, Chippendale, vol. 1, pp. 51-2
- 143 Pollen, 'Furniture and Woodwork', p. 155
- 144 PP. 1888, Sweating System, pp. 210, 218-9 + 521
- 145 ibid., p. 520
- 146 David George Blankenhorn, 'Cabinet Makers in Victorian Britain. A Study of Two Trade Unions', Essay in part requirement for M.A., University of Warwick, 1978, pp. 113-9
- 147 PP. 1888, Sweating System, p. 211. see also p.
- 148 ibid., p. 518
- 149 ibid., p. 288
- 150 ibid., p. 288 and PP. 1890 (5) vol. XVII, Sweating System, pp. 280 and 337-8

CHAPTER 5

WORKSHOPS: SIZE AND STOCK

WORKSHOPS: SIZE AND STOCK

Throughout the period 1700 to 1870, most furniture-making firms employed between one and ten people. The rise of the comprehensive firm, however, led to an increase in the size of certain furniture-making establishments. Even in the first half of the eighteenth century, when firms with one showroom and one workshop supplemented only by a feather garret were common¹, the largest firms occupied extensive premises and employed a considerable number of people. In the third quarter of the eighteenth century, leading West End comprehensive firms employed about forty to fifty people but, by the early nineteenth century, certain firms employed twice as many. By the mid-nineteenth century, they employed between 100 and 350, while the largest known West End furniture-making workforce stood at between 600 and 1,000 in 1876².

The evidence concerning numbers employed, size of workshop and stock held comes from a variety of sources, the main ones being newspaper reports, particularly of fires; insurance valuations; inventories and the accounts of individual firms. Unfortunately, the figures given are not always precise. In newspaper reports estimates of stock are usually cited in round figures which cannot always be verified from other sources and sometimes appear to be exaggerated. Likewise, it is difficult to estimate numbers employed because newspaper reports often indicate the number of employees affected by, say, loss of tools, without specifying whether or not they represented the total workforce, whereas inventories usually record only the number of workbenches within a firm.

Throughout this chapter correlations are made between the number of workbenches in a particular workshop and the number of persons employed therein but totals obtained by this method can provide no more than a rough guide to the numbers who actually worked there. For the woodworking

trades, where each craftsman worked at his own bench, it is a reasonably accurate guide but is less so for upholstery, where it seems unlikely that there was one work-board or work-table per upholsterer. There were probably more upholsterers employed than there were work-tables and upholstery women who did the sewing also need to be added to the total number of workers engaged in the production process. Besides this, masters also employed general labourers as well as clerks and foremen.

Within a decade of the Restoration, sizeable furniture-making firms were operating in the capital. In 1670, the stock of William Ridges, upholsterer, was valued at approximately £4,600 for probate purposes³. He had extensive workshops in the City, which included feather, flock and fustian garrets as well as starching, tick, carpet, cutting and chair rooms⁴. The large stock held by Ridges makes the £9,000 worth of stock reported destroyed by fire in 1712 at the Crown and Cushion, a large upholsterer's shop in Covent Garden owned by a Mr. Arne, a credible figure⁵. Other furniture firms are not known to have held stock of similar value until the 1780s, although eminent furniture-makers such as Gumley, Grendey, Bell, Goodison or Hallett may well have held comparable amounts in the years before 1750.

The 'illustrious room' in Exeter Exchange that was Gumley's showroom in the second decade of the eighteenth century must have housed a very valuable stock because the looking-glasses in which he specialised were particularly expensive commodities⁶. In 1728, it was reported that the total stock, including timber (of which the walnut plank alone was valued at £500), of Daniel Bell amounted to 'some thousands of pounds'⁷. Bell, whose workshops were at the back of St. Martin's Lane, was also reported to employ 'several scores of workpeople'⁸. Even allowing for journalistic exaggeration,

Bell employed a considerable number of people and probably ran one of the largest furniture-making concerns of the first half of the eighteenth century.

Another extensive business was that of Giles Grendey. It was located, from 1731 at least, in Aylesbury House, St. John's Square, Clerkenwell, a large establishment which had been the town house of the Earls of Aylesbury in the seventeenth century⁹. There, to judge by a single consignment of goods for export valued at £1,000, Grendey manufactured furniture on a large scale¹⁰. Premises were cheaper in Clerkenwell than in the West End, to where the upper classes had migrated, and Grendey was able to afford larger premises there than in the West End. He was, however, further removed from the wealthiest patrons than furniture-makers such as Hallett, Linnell, Vile and others who worked in the St. Martin's Lane - Long Acre area. William Gomm also acquired premises, which had formerly belonged to a member of the aristocracy, in Clerkenwell¹¹. Gomm used the house for showrooms and built extensive double-storied workshops, with nine windows to each storey on at least one facade, over the surviving basement of a medieval building¹². Furthermore, it was in nearby Aldersgate Street that Seddon built up his very extensive business from about 1754¹³.

The location of the business run by Francis Croxford, cabinet- and chair-maker (fl.c.1730), is not known but the firm must have come close to rivalling Gumley, Grendey and Bell in size. When his stock was sold in 1733 it consisted of not only framed chimney-glasses, sconces, desks, clothes-chests, bookcases, tables, dressing-glasses, dressing-tables, and 'chests-upon-chests' but also about 'one hundred dozen of chairs of several sorts'. Although chairs may have been stock-piled for some considerable time before the 1733 sale, no other firm is known to have produced chairs on such a scale¹⁴. By contrast, Thomas Perkins, whose firm also produced

chairs, had only eighty-five chair frames and one settee bedstead in stock at the time of his death in 1723. That Perkins worked in a relatively small way is confirmed by the fact that he employed only five journeymen. His stock of wood, consisting of 'India, Virginia and French' walnut, was valued at £80¹⁵.

Certain employers took out licences in 1750 to employ workers who did not belong to the London Companies¹⁶. These craftsmen probably represented only a proportion of the total workforce of each employer but certain masters took on quite large numbers. Francis Say, a member of the Upholsterers' Company who ran a cabinet-making and upholstery firm, for instance, took as many as twenty in 1756 and Francis Gilding, another eminent furniture-maker, registered eighteen non-freemen in 1758¹⁷. The total workforce of each of these firms may have been as many as forty, the number given by Justus Möser in his account of an English furniture-making business in an essay published in 1767¹⁸.

A fire destroyed the tool chests of twenty-two workmen at the firm of Chippendale in 1755 but these represented only a section of the workforce¹⁹. In the same year, a fire at the workshops of Bradshaw, Saunders and Smith destroyed the tool chests of thirty-seven journeymen. This figure is probably closer to the total number of craftsmen employed than that of Chippendale because the entire premises were consumed in the blaze²⁰. Five years later, Saunders, by then on his own, had thirty-two woodworking benches and ten work-boards for upholstery. He also had two turner's lathes which suggests that, on occasions at least, two turners were employed, thus bringing the number of craftsmen employed to about forty-four²¹. To this must be added upholstery women, who, with labourers and clerks, brought his workforce to about fifty, perhaps more.

William Linnell employed only slightly fewer workpeople in 1763²².

There were thirteen work benches in the Linnell cabinet shop. In the cabinet, carving and joinery shops together, however, about thirty craftsmen were housed. In a firm which originated as a carving concern, the carving shop contained approximately the same number of benches as the cabinet shop. In the former there were seven benches in the middle of the room and an unspecified number arranged half way around the outside of the room which probably accounted for as many again²³. There were also three benches in the joinery shop and a joiner's chest with tools in the large garret known as the 'joinery and carving shop'. The gilding shop housed four benches but there is no indication of the number of people working in the chair room. The turner's tools in a tub in the chair room and in the cupboard in the cabinet shop suggest that, like the firm of Saunders, one or two turners were at least occasionally employed. In the main upholstery shop there were five shop boards for working on but there is no mention of the workpeople who sewed carpets or of the women who sewed upholstery and did other light work. Including labourers, clerks and foremen, the Linnell firm probably employed between forty and fifty people in 1763²⁴.

It is possible to compare the stock held by some of the leading firms in the 1760s. Some of the figures come from insurance records, estimates for which may well have been higher than valuations made for probate, auction or other purposes. On the other hand, not all insurance valuations represent the total amount of insurance cover since policies were sometimes taken out with more than one company. Furthermore, stock and goods in trade were not always itemised separately from household goods, particularly in policies which gave cover for relatively small amounts. Nevertheless, in any given year the insurance policies taken out by furniture-makers indicate which firms had the largest amounts of stock.

They also illustrate the gulf between the small firms, with stock and household goods together valued at only, say, £80, and the large ones with similar items valued at over £3,000²⁵. The cover required by individual firms fluctuated so greatly, however, that any comparisons which are not closely linked in time can be taken as no more than indications of the relative strengths of the particular firms and need to be considered against other evidence. George Smith Bradshaw, for instance, insured his household goods and stock for £4,200 in 1763 whereas two years later the cover had dropped to £3,600²⁶. The drop in cover required by Chippendale after the death of Rannie is the most well-known case of insurance cover reflecting only a particular period in the history of a firm which was considerably better stocked at other times²⁷. Fortunately, the two most detailed known valuations of stock held by furniture-makers in the second half of the eighteenth century, those relating to Saunders and Linnell, were made within three years of each other and were not related to insurance cover, although any comparison between the two firms must still take into account the particular circumstances in which each valuation was made.

The inventory of Paul Saunder's unwrought stock was prepared by independent furniture-makers when it was bought by Samuel Norman in 1760. Although it included no finished items, the valuation came to £1,270²⁸, which compares very favourably with that of £1,255 placed on Linnell's finished goods, materials, tools and goods in hand²⁹. The relatively low Linnell figure may be accounted for partly by the circumstances in which the valuation was made since it was taken after William's death in February 1763 but before the sale of his goods three months later. Stocks of wood and glass were particularly low: these may have been allowed to run down in the period immediately before his death but there is no completely satisfactory explanation of the low quantity of materials³⁰. Stock purchased by

William's son John was not recorded in the inventory of his father's goods. Nevertheless, the Linnell stock of 1763 was far smaller than the £3,600 stock and goods in trade held in the following year by Linnell's rival, Samuel Norman³¹, whose firm was based on carving and gilding as well as cabinet-making and upholstery.

Unfortunately, the only figure available for the firm of Chippendale in the 1760s is for 1767, after the death of Rannie and the withdrawal of his capital from the firm. In that year, the stock and goods in trade of the firm amounted to only £1,800³², a figure close to, but which was still greater than, that for Linnell four years earlier. Insurance valuations for earlier years, however, indicate that the firm of Chippendale and Rannie operated on a much greater scale. Their premises housed nearly £2,500 worth of stock in 1755, a figure which had increased to the very considerable sum of £3,860 by the following year³³. It seems reasonable to suppose that once the firm recovered from the death of Rannie and further capital was brought in by Haig, it again held considerable stock. The £3,860 insurance value placed on their stock by Chippendale and Rannie in 1756 compares well with the £2,700 for that of Francis Gilding in 1763³⁴ and £3,600 for that of Samuel Norman in 1764³⁵.

Details of stock are not often given in insurance quotations but inventories and other sources provide a few examples of glass and timber held by some of the leading firms. As already stated, Bell had walnut to the value of £500 on his premises in 1728³⁶ and, in 1760, Saunders' wood was valued at more than £800, of which almost £600 was for 11,986 feet of solid mahogany and £52 for 2,300 feet of veneers³⁷. Chippendale and Rannie held fairly extensive timber stocks but the value is not known³⁸. The Linnell inventory of 1763, however, includes very little wood apart from 'parcels' of mahogany and more exotic woods together with odds and ends

of solid mahogany and veneers³⁹. The inventory does not mention a drying room for timber, such as those included in the workshops of both Chippendale⁴⁰ and Saunders⁴¹, but there was a saw-pit at the Berkeley Square premises⁴². Linnell may have stored less wood than Saunders or Chippendale but that does not explain why the inventory does not include the stock necessary to meet the firm's regular output of cabinet-work and chairs. As already stated, stocks may have been run down prior to William Linnell's death and then built up by John who knew he was to succeed his father. In later years at least he bought in wood where he could, including unseasoned yew cut down on the Child estate⁴³.

The amount of glass held in stock by Linnell was also low, particularly for a firm renowned for its ornamental frames. Twenty mirror-glasses, together with other odd items, amounted to only £124. 7s. 0d., or about £6 per glass on average, confirming that it was old glass⁴⁴. The high cost of new glass and its liability to damage meant that it was often obtained from glass-grinders as and when it was needed. In the 1760s, John Linnell supplied single plate glasses that cost more than the total glass valuation in the firm's 1763 inventory⁴⁵ and, in 1770, had £600 worth of foreign glass held up in Customs⁴⁶. The low glass stock in the inventory should not, therefore, be taken as an indication that the firm did not supply large amounts of new glass as well as re-work old glass for customers. Similarly, while the firm of Chippendale had insurance cover on glass of only £100, £300 and £200 (and this last figure included china) in 1756, 1757 and 1767 respectively, the firm often supplied mirror-glasses costing upwards of £200 each⁴⁷. The glass itemised at £400 in Norman's insurance policy of 1763 was for that in situ at the assembly rooms run by Theresa Cornelys and did not represent stock in his shop⁴⁸, suggesting that glass was bought in when and if it was needed.

The amount of goods and stock held by the leading West End firms

in the second half of the eighteenth century was surpassed by the firm of Seddon which, by the 1780s at least, was the largest furniture-making firm in London. In the early 1760s, however, the firm was probably no larger, or at any rate not a great deal larger, than a leading West End firm such as that of Saunders, Chippendale or Linnell. George Seddon established his firm in 1754 in Aldersgate Street, an area of which it was said twenty years later that 'the politeness of town is far removed from hence'⁴⁹, in order to obtain a two-acre site which included the former residence of the Bishop of London⁵⁰. The firm does not appear to have been particularly large in its first decade. In 1763, stock and household goods together were insured with two insurance firms for a total of just over £1,800⁵¹, a sum not much greater than that of £1,600 for Linnell's stock and household goods in the same year⁵² and less than the £2,000 insurance valuation placed on similar items by Thomas Chippendale in 1767⁵³. By 1765, however, Seddon's policy with the Sun Insurance Office amounted to £3,600, as did that of George Smith Bradshaw in the same year⁵⁴. In 1768, Seddon was insured with the same insurance company for £3,300, which probably included household goods as well as stock, but he allowed his policy to lapse before a fire in that year⁵⁵. He claimed losses of £7,300⁵⁶ when he put his case before the directors of the Sun Insurance Office, who awarded him £500 compensation⁵⁵⁵⁷. In 1770, Seddon insured his stock for £4,300⁵⁸ but, by the late 1780s, when the firm employed about 400 people, the stock is claimed to have stood at over £100,000. Edwards and Macquoid stated that the firm's stock-taking of 1789 amounted to £118,926, of which £21,702 was for timber, £9,069 for carpets and £3,293 for the contents of the upholstery warehouse⁵⁹. It has not been possible to verify these detailed figures but Seddon undoubtedly 'carried on a very extensive trade'⁶⁰.

Seddon not only appears to have held the largest stock of any

furniture-making firm in the late eighteenth century but he also employed the largest workforce. In 1768 he was reported as employing eighty people⁶¹, a number larger than the workforce of any West End firm at that time, although the 'several scores' who worked for Bell in 1728 may have accounted for as many. Seddon took on more apprentices than any rival⁶² and, by 1783, the number of journeymen employed was said to be nearly 300⁶³. In 1786, after a visit to the firm, Sophie Von La Roche noted that there were 400 employees to whom Seddon was 'foster-father'⁶⁴. This figure might have included the metal and glass workers whom she claimed worked there⁶⁵ and also furniture-makers who bound their own apprentices but continued to live at Seddon's in Aldersgate Street, together with their apprentices⁶⁶. Even if the number of furniture-makers stood as low as 300 in 1786, this was still enormous when compared to other firms. The firm of Seddon in the late eighteenth century was exceptional, however, even by the standards of the following half century. The comparatively small size of the workforces of Saunders, Linnell, Chippendale and others should not be taken to indicate their insignificance within the metropolitan furniture-making trade. Rather they should be seen as typical of the leading high class furniture-makers who ran comprehensive firms in the quality trade in the second half of the eighteenth century.

That the firm of Seddon was not as exceptional in the nineteenth century as it was in the late eighteenth century was partly because of internal problems after the death of George Seddon in 1804⁶⁷ and partly because of the increase in size of other firms. In 1811, a trade guide estimated that the value of goods in furniture shops was about £10-30,000⁶⁸ but few firms are known to have held stocks over £10,000. The stock of the younger Chippendale was extensive: it took two days to sell the furniture and a further three to sell the timber after the closure of the

firm in 1804, but no total valuation is known⁶⁹. At about the same date, the showrooms of the firm of Oakley were described as 'immense',⁷⁰ but the production of the items displayed therein took place in workshops in St. Paul's Churchyard, of which there is no description. Thomas and George Seddon insured their stock for £10,000 in 1818⁷¹, a figure which is close to the total stock valuation of £10,723 for Miles and Edwards of Oxford Street⁷². In 1830, the Seddon brothers lost £1,500 worth of mahogany alone in a fire at their Bartholemew Close workshops⁷³. The firm probably expanded shortly after that date when it moved to a new two-storied, seven-bayed building in Grays Inn Road designed by J.B. Papworth in 1830-2, to which large drying sheds for timber were added in 1836⁷⁴. The stock of Holland and Company, which in the mid-nineteenth century was one of the largest West End comprehensive manufacturing firms, was only £18,224 in 1854⁷⁵. These figures suggest therefore that the leading comprehensive firms held stocks of between £10-20,000 in the first half of the nineteenth century and that the figure of £30,000 is an exaggeration.

No firm is known to have employed as many workers as Seddon in the 1780s until Holland was recorded in the 1851 census returns as employing 350 people⁷⁶. The next largest known workforces in the first half of the nineteenth century were about 100. Gillow's London branch employed 100 people at the very least in 1813, when the tools of that number of workmen were destroyed by fire at the firm's workshops in Providence Court, North Audley Street⁷⁷. But, because much of this firm's work was produced at the Lancaster branch, it cannot be regarded as typical of other West End firms whose goods were all produced in the capital. Nevertheless, the number employed approximates to the 'nearly one hundred mechanics besides other necessary servants' employed by Morgan and Saunders, general and 'patent' furniture-makers, in 1809⁷⁸. Seddon also employed at least 100

workpeople in 1830 when the tools of that number were destroyed by fire at the firm's workshops⁷⁹. The largest London furniture-making firms, therefore, employed between 100 and 350 people in the first half of the nineteenth century.

By contrast, the stock of E. B. Deeble of Welbeck Street, Cavendish Square, which was sold in 1822, included only eleven workbenches, six of which were specified as cabinet-makers' benches. There were also four cutting boards in the upholsterers' room and a turning lathe, suggesting that he employed at least sixteen people⁸⁰. When a near neighbour of his, John Penning, cabinet-maker and upholsterer of 6 Holles Street, went bankrupt in 1830, he owned eighteen cabinet-makers' benches and some cutting boards, one of which was particularly large, measuring 10'8" x 4'2"⁸¹. It was stated in the bankruptcy proceedings in 1830 against Charles Gregory, cabinet-maker and upholsterer of Great Surrey Street, Blackfriars Road, that he had employed more than thirty men⁸². His sister-in-law also worked for him, making and lining cushions and doing other light upholstery work but no mention is made of any other female employees.

These examples of smaller firms illustrate the point made by George Dodd in his commentary on British manufacturing industries published in 1843 that, although furniture was made on a vast scale in London, production did not generally take place in large factories. Pieces of furniture were, he wrote, 'the productions of tradesmen, each of whom can carry on a tolerably extensive business without great extent of room, or a large number of workmen' but, unfortunately, he did not specify the numbers involved⁸³. The 1851 census confirms that the vast majority of furniture-making firms in London employed fewer than fifty people⁸⁴. Indeed, of cabinet-makers, approximately 80% employed between one and five, 10% between five and nine and a further 9% between ten and fifty. Less than 1% employed between

fifty and one hundred while approximately 0.2% had over three hundred workers⁸⁵. East End firms tended to be smaller than those in the West End. In the East End streets of Curtain Road, Worship Street and Skinner Street, just over 90% of all furniture-making firms employed between one and ten workers whereas 80% of a similar number of firms in the West End streets of Oxford Street, Tottenham Court Road, Wardour Street and New Bond Street, employed that number⁸⁶. Just over 9% of the East End firms studied employed between ten and fifty persons whereas 22% of the West End firms studied did so.

The largest West End firm noted in the 1851 census was that of Holland and Company with 350 employees⁸⁷. During the following decade it was probably as large, if not larger, than that of Jackson and Graham which, in 1856, was said to employ about 250 people on average⁸⁸. After that date Jackson and Graham expanded and, by 1876, employed between 600 and 1,000 workers⁸⁹. The numbers employed by Holland and Company in the 1850s, 60s and 70s are not known but, to judge by the preparatory woodworking machinery installed in their workshops⁹⁰, this leading firm must have had one of the largest workforces in London. Howard which, like Holland and Jackson and Graham, was cited as one of the major firms in 1876, employed between 150 and 200 men at cabinet-making and joinery alone in that year⁹¹. By that date, however, the large firms were threatened by competition from the cheap trade⁹². Workforces were reduced in size as goods were bought in rather than manufactured on the premises. Numbers were rapidly reduced in the 1880s when the effects of the sweating system brought to an end the old comprehensive firm described in the preceding chapter⁹³. By the 1890s, the once large employers of the West End employed fifty people at most, even when they were busy⁹⁴.

Footnotes

- 1 CLRO. Miscellaneous Common Serjeants, see Staples, Box 46, Book 6, fo. 43; Cooke, Box 45, Book 6, fo. 238; Wignall, Box 47, Book 6, fo. 588 and Friend, Box 56, Roll 223
- 2 J.H. Pollen, 'Furniture and Woodwork', in G.B. Bevan, ed. British Manufacturing Industries, 1876, pp. 203-4
- 3 CLRO. Common Serjeants, Box 8, Book 2, fo. 2518
- 4 ibid.
- 5 Francis Boyer Relton (compiled by), An Account of the Fire Insurance Companies Associations Projects and Schemes Established and Projected in Great Britain and Ireland during the 17th and 18th Centuries including the Sun Fire Office: Also of Charles Povey The Projector of that Office His Writings and Schemes, 1893, pp. 417-8
- 6 see Geoffrey Beard, 'Three eighteenth-century cabinet-makers: Moore, Goodison and Vile', The Burlington Magazine, July 1977, p. 479 and GCM pp. 40-1
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C H A P T E R 6

THE ENTREPRENEUR FURNITURE-MAKER

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In 1700, the entrepreneur furniture-maker was usually also a craftsman and, if the firm worked to original designs, he was also a designer¹. The role of the entrepreneur furniture-maker was sub-divided in the eighteenth century, however, as design, craft and managerial functions separated and, by 1870, they were never exercised by one person in any sizeable establishment in London. Craft work was left to journeymen and apprentices while design came to be dominated by specialists, allowing the entrepreneur furniture-makers to concentrate on running their firms, a task in which they were often assisted by foremen, clerks and others.

In the years before the development of the comprehensive manufacturing firm, there were probably furniture-makers whose time was so taken up with the running of their businesses that they had little or no time to handle the tools of their trade. This was certainly the case as the size and scope of firms expanded in the second half of the eighteenth century. Justus Möser, in an essay published in 1767, stated that the master cabinet-maker 'no longer touches a tool'². The master concentrated on overseeing production and, according to Möser, corrected the mistakes of the workmen and showed them ways to better their work and improve their techniques. This involvement with the production process, albeit at the level of demonstrating, implies a high degree of craft competence. The development of the comprehensive manufacturing firm, however, meant that, even if a master was a craftsman, his firm included areas of production outside his own particular craft expertise. Partners or foremen were used to ease the problem of supervising those areas of production. The description of John Cobb, upholsterer turned entrepreneur furniture-maker, strutting around his workshop dressed like a gentleman, suggests that Cobb, who ran one of the leading firms of the second half of

the eighteenth century, rarely undertook any task, even demonstrating, that would dirty his hands or clothes³.

Most entrepreneurs remained craft-trained until the early nineteenth century. In 1826, a journeyman upholsterer commented that the employers who were then attempting to reduce the wages of upholsterers had themselves been journeymen⁴. After that date, however, the number of non-craftsmen masters increased although the paucity of apprenticeship records for the nineteenth century makes it difficult to establish whether particular masters had been brought up to a craft or not. The transfer from journeyman to employer continued in the years up to 1870 and beyond because it remained possible to set up business in a small way without a great deal of capital. It became increasingly difficult, however, to set up in any substantial way and compete with the larger firms.

It was not essential to have been a craftsman to become an entrepreneur. Indeed, John Gumley, who headed one of the largest furniture-making firms in the early eighteenth century, had close connections with the manufacture and sale of glass and may not have been a craftsman furniture-maker⁵. It was not until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, however, that non-craftsmen began to head furniture-making firms with any regularity. Thomas Butler, who ran a patent and general furniture manufactory in Catherine Street from 1787, for instance, appears to have been an attorney's clerk by training⁶. When Thomas Morgan, an under-clerk in Butler's office, set up in business on his own he had no craft training but at least had some experience of retailing and knowledge of fabrics because, in earlier years, he had been a linen-draper⁷. Despite his experience with Butler's firm, he took care to go into partnership with Joseph Sanders, who was almost certainly a craftsman since he supervised the manufacturing side of Butler's business

in the eight years prior to his partnership with Morgan in 1800, and had earlier worked for the royal cabinet-makers Elward and Marsh⁸. In the fierce advertising battle fought between the two firms in the early years of the nineteenth century, Morgan and Sanders emphasised the fact that not only did Butler have no craft connections but neither had his chief assistants, one of whom they claimed had been a shoemaker and the other a butcher⁹. Whether or not these accusations were true, it was clearly felt that customers preferred a manufacturer to have had a craft training.

The firm of Seddon was headed by craftsmen for three generations but Thomas Seddon III, great-grandson of the founder, assisted with the management of the firm as soon as he left school in 1836¹⁰. His father was bound as an apprentice in 1806¹¹ but thirty years later a craft training was not considered necessary for his eldest son and heir to the family furniture-making business.

When Henry Mayhew surveyed the cheap furniture trade in 1850, the chair-makers' trade society informed him that employers with no practical knowledge of the trade had recently set up in business¹². John Maple, head of the Tottenham Court Road firm which bought in part of its stock from the cheap trade, epitomised the non-craftsman entrepreneur furniture-maker. His early business activities centred on his linen-drapery firm which he established in the 1840s and soon expanded to include furniture-making¹³. Sims, whose large looking-glass manufactory, which expanded into furniture-making in the 1860s, has already been discussed¹⁴, also entered furniture-making without any craft knowledge. He began as a looking-glass maker before expanding into frame-making so that he did not have to buy in the frames for his looking-glasses¹⁵. From there he moved into general furniture production in a small way. Similarly, the founder of the frame-making firm of Webster, which also made some furniture in the

1860s, began his career selling religious prints before becoming involved in the manufacture of frames in which the prints were mounted¹⁶.

From time to time non-craftsmen were brought into furniture-making firms headed by craftsmen. Partnerships increased as the organisation of individual firms became more complex. The need for financial, managerial and clerical assistance on the one hand and craft expertise on the other were the main reasons for partnerships in furniture-making. Finance, however, was the prime motive. The risks involved in furniture-making were many but, with adequate capital, most storms could be weathered. If a partner was brought in simply to finance an establishment, then it did not matter whether or not he was a craftsman. Thomas Chippendale's partnerships with James Rannie and Thomas Haig were both formed to bring some financial security to his firm, as was probably that with Henry Ferguson¹⁷. Rannie possibly had some craft knowledge but this was certainly not the case with Haig who was the firm's accountant¹⁸. In similar fashion but within a much smaller firm, Thomas Reuben Craven, a chemist and druggist of Saint John Street, Middlesex, with no knowledge of furniture-making, was taken into partnership by Samuel Martin, upholsterer in the City of London, in 1778 upon providing £200 towards the business¹⁹.

Financial considerations were also evident when George Seddon II made his will in 1808. He recommended his wife to take a partner in the event of financial difficulties after his death.²⁰ He stipulated a partner 'in every way qualified to manage the business' and who could bring at least £8,000 into the business. Seddon saw an outside partner as only a temporary expedient and suggested that if money was not withdrawn from the firm then his wife should continue it on her own until her eldest nephew was of age²¹. In the event, George Seddon's hope that the firm would remain in family hands was fulfilled when, after his death, it was taken over by two craft-trained nephews²².

The comprehensive nature of production and the many absences of a master from the workshops on a variety of business matters meant that foremen were used to oversee production. They mainly supervised the manufacture of goods and controlled the quality of production but even in this area decisions had to be made and mistakes could cost the owner dearly. John Linnell, for instance, lost money when a foreman made a mistake concerning the cutting of expensive upholstery material²³. Although foremen were supposed to supervise work in the master's absence there was one occasion on which Chippendale had to leave for France before his foreman returned from Yorkshire, where he had been attending to family business, and consequently work on a barometer for Sir Rowland Winn was neglected²⁴. Foremen were also sent to supervise jobs outside the firm. When Elliott and Francis placed a foreman in charge of their men working at the New Royal Mews, Pimlico, in the mid-1820s, they paid him twice the rate they paid their upholsterers²⁵. In the mid-nineteenth century, foremen in cabinet-making shops gave the craftsmen a sketch of the article to be made and indicated the materials to be used, although the craftsmen normally cut out all their own work²⁶. In the larger shops, however, 'chalk' foremen marked out the wood prior to cutting when they were busy and, in a very few shops, such a foreman was permanently employed marking out wood²⁷. This undoubtedly improved productivity but the foremen in the quality trade were not paid bonuses in order to boost production, as were those in the cheaper end of the trade²⁸.

The experience of working as a foreman gave some men the confidence to set up on their own. Indeed, often the only reference to a particular person having been a foreman is that included in advertisements when he was already working for himself. Just as the fact of having trained or worked as a craftsman in an important firm was used for publicity, certain entrepreneurs boasted of their experience as foremen. Those such as Cobb's

foreman, Jenkins, became masters without leaving the firms in which they had been employed, taking over on the retirement or death of their employer²⁹. This provided a continuity of business paralleled in other firms when a son or close relative brought up in the business took over. The length of time spent as a foreman differed from person to person and from shop to shop, just as did the length of time spent as a journeyman. Certain foremen held their positions for a considerable number of years, their growing expertise providing stability within the firm concerned. One of Hallett's foremen stayed for eleven years³⁰ while Thomas Baildon worked as a foreman to Haig and Chippendale for fourteen years before setting up on his own in 1785 in his native Yorkshire³¹. Similarly, Richard Birkit worked for more than ten years as the foreman of John Blease before the latter went bankrupt in 1811³².

Even with assistants supervising the manufacturing side, the entrepreneur still had to manage the rest of the business. The pressure on his time was somewhat alleviated if design work was undertaken by a specialist³³ but the owner who had been trained as a craftsman rather than a businessman welcomed assistance from members of his household, clerks and others with what he often regarded as burdensome tasks. In the eighteenth century, the wives of many craftsmen-shopkeepers were so involved with helping their husbands run a business that they were described as 'mistress of the managing part of it'³⁴. The efforts of such women, many of them the daughters of tradesmen, are far from adequately documented but the well-being and smooth running of many furniture firms probably depended on the energies and capabilities of the wife of the owner. As entrepreneurs increasingly abandoned working at a craft, the lack of craft skill of most wives became less important when they were left to manage the firm on their own after the death of a husband. In many cases, this was done only

until a craft-trained son or male relative was able to take over or in order to better wind up the affairs of the firm.

Certain women themselves acted as entrepreneurs. Elizabeth Gumley worked in partnership with her son John and continued the business after his death in 1729, although then in partnership with William Turing³⁵. Elizabeth Gumley took over her son's appointment as royal cabinet-maker in 1729 and, at the same time, Sarah Gilbert took over the post of royal upholsterer after the death of her husband³⁶. The latter worked on her own until 1738 when she went into partnership with William Reason, with whom she continued to supply furniture to the royal household until 1745³⁷. Ann Pascall was another widow who continued her husband's furniture-making business for at least eight years after his death in 1746³⁸. It was most unusual for a daughter to take over and run a firm but this was done by Catherine Naish, who continued to supply furniture to the royal household after the death of her father, Henry Williams, in 1759³⁹.

Not all wives assisted with the business. The wealth of certain leading entrepreneurs meant that they could afford their wives to withdraw from business activities and live more like gentlewomen⁴⁰. Defoe commented, in the 1720s, on how some women acted as if they were ashamed to be the wives of tradesmen⁴¹ but it was probably only the leading West End furniture-makers who could afford their wives not to work in the firm. The haughty John Cobb, who paraded through his workshops dressed like a gentleman⁴², probably tried to keep his wife in the manner of a gentlewoman and it is clear from his will that George Seddon II did not envisage his wife running the family firm after his death for any extended length of time in the way that Ann Pascall or Sarah Gilbert had done⁴³. The gradual withdrawal of the wives of the wealthier entrepreneurs from assisting with the running of the business, however, was only one factor in the increasing

number of managers, assistants and clerks employed in furniture firms. Businesses were increasing in size and therefore needed extra staff to cope with the increasing amount of administrative and managerial work.

It is difficult to know when clerks were first employed by furniture-makers but the larger firms undoubtedly used their services in the first half of the eighteenth century as businesses grew beyond the control of the partners or a man assisted by his wife. Even when clerks were employed, however, entrepreneurs continued to undertake clerical and administrative tasks, some of which were extremely time consuming. John Linnell wrote personally to clients about important commissions and the considerable detail in which this was done is best illustrated by his correspondence with William Drake for whom he furnished Shardeloes in Buckinghamshire in the 1760s⁴⁴. He also wrote personally when requesting bills to be paid. He did so politely to William Drake, a ready payer, but was markedly less polite to Lord Uxbridge who was slow to settle the final part of his account⁴⁵. The first documented reference to Linnell's clerk Daniel Leech is in 1772⁴⁶, although he or someone else was probably employed earlier. Linnell's clerk may be the same Leech referred to as a cabinet-maker in 1770⁴⁷. If so, his knowledge of furniture-making would have been of great assistance in his job which involved helping with the day-to-day running of the firm⁴⁸.

John Mayhew dealt personally with customers' complaints or, at least, the complaints of important customers such as Boulton and Fothergill.⁴⁹ Mayhew personally made out the partnership's cash book but other records, such as order books, delivery books, time books, pay books, job and tradesmen's invoices, were compiled by the firm's clerks from entries jotted down by Ince and Mayhew⁵⁰. The younger Chippendale assisted his father, receipting goods and bills and writing to an important client, Sir Roland

Winn in 1767, shortly after the death of his father's partner James Rannie⁵¹. Although most of the correspondence with Sir Rowland Winn was undertaken by Thomas Chippendale Senior, Chippendale Junior wrote to Winn in 1771 as did Thomas Haig, who became a partner in the firm in that year⁵². Haig had not undertaken such duties when he worked as book-keeper and clerk in the firm, suggesting that it was considered that correspondence with important clients should be conducted by the owner of the firm, his son in his absence, or, when in partnership, his partner.

William Kidd gave up his clerical duties when he entered into partnership with his former employer, Robert Kennett, cabinet-maker and upholsterer of New Bond Street⁵³. Kidd worked as a clerk for Kennett between 1787 and 1792. His annual salary was £55 in 1787, rising to £70 by 1790. He stopped receiving a salary in April 1792 when he went into unofficial partnership with Kennett⁵⁴. He continued to work as a clerk until June 1792, when he became an official partner. After that date he discontinued his clerical duties but supervised the firm's financial affairs while Kennett, the major partner, remained in sole charge of the manufacturing side of the business⁵⁵.

Relatively simple tasks such as the signing of receipts which did not involve liaison with customers were not only carried out by the sons of entrepreneurs, such as John Linnell and Thomas Chippendale Junior, but also by employees in firms where the owner had no son training to succeed him. Benjamin Goodison, for instance, allowed his employee and nephew, Benjamin Parran, to sign receipts for him⁵⁶. William Vile signed a letter on behalf of his master William Hallett in 1749⁵¹ and, when Vile himself worked for the royal household in the early 1760s, his employees France and Bradburn signed on behalf of the firm for goods received via the Lord Chamberlain's Office from other craftsmen and tradesmen⁵⁸.

Just as John Linnell and Thomas Chippendale Junior were trained to manage their family firms, certain apprentices were also trained in management. The Samuel Beth or Betts who signed for goods in the Lord Chamberlain's Office on behalf of John Trotter in 1755⁵⁹ was Trotter's apprentice at the time⁶⁰. He was taken on for the extraordinarily large sum of £200, which was probably paid on the understanding that the boy would be trained in business as well as craft matters⁶¹. It has been assumed that those who signed on behalf of men they referred to as master were also apprentices⁶² but this is not necessarily so because the word master was also used by journeymen to refer to their employers: Benjamin Parran, for instance, was long out of his apprenticeship when he signed on behalf of Goodison in the royal household accounts from 1759⁶³. Similarly, France and Bradburn were out of their time when they signed on behalf of Vile and Cobb because, when their masters lost the royal commission, they immediately took it over⁶⁴. How far those who were out of their time worked at the bench at the same time as carrying out administrative tasks is not known. Some may have combined both functions more or less equally but others may have acted more or less as full-time assistants.

Managerial responsibilities became increasingly specialised in the second half of the eighteenth century. The partners Ince and Mayhew (fl.1759-1804) are the first known furniture-making entrepreneurs to have divided the responsibility for management and design between them. Ince worked mainly at 'designing and drawing' while Mayhew undertook the management of the firm⁶⁵. Ince tried keeping the cash accounts early in the partnership but soon gave up and 'the paying and receiving of monies and the keeping of books and accounts and making out of bills and every other part of the active management was left entirely to ... John Mayhew'⁶⁶. That the idea of employing someone to manage a furniture-making business was

accepted by the mid-eighteenth century is illustrated by an advertisement of 1751 in which a person 'bred' in a cabinet-making and upholstery business was sought either to manage a firm or to enter into partnership with the owner⁶⁷. The two earliest known examples of managers, however, date from the late eighteenth century. The first is that of William France who deputed for his brother-in-law Charles Elliott and effectively managed Elliott's firm from the late 1780s until he was taken into partnership in 1808⁶⁸. The second is that of Joseph Sanders who, between 1793 and 1801, supervised the manufacturing side of Thomas Butler's business and was responsible for the sole management of the firm between 1798 and 1801⁶⁹.

Daniel Wright worked as 'assistant in the management' of his brother's furniture-making firm in the first decade of the nineteenth century⁷⁰. Although he conducted important matters of business when his brother, Francis Wright, was indisposed, he remained an employee. He was paid a salary and had no share of any profit or loss made by his brother⁷¹. In the years immediately before 1818, Gillow of Oxford Street employed a 'chief managing clerk'⁷², a title which suggests certain managerial as well as clerical duties, but the extent to which managerial decisions were delegated to such persons is not known. By the mid-nineteenth century, certain of the larger firms allowed foremen to hire labour, a managerial function formerly undertaken only by employers themselves⁷³.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century the larger comprehensive manufacturing firms were run by men who no longer practised their own craft and two or three decades later it was no longer even considered necessary that they were trained in a craft. The removal of the craft function and the development of the professional designer, which will be examined in the following chapter, left the owner of a furniture-making firm as a businessman, one who, in the larger firms, was assisted by a range of employees including managers, foremen and clerks. Anyone with sufficient capital could set up

a furniture-making business, although craft and design expertise proved useful, particularly in the eighteenth century. The amounts required to establish and run a comprehensive firm increased as they grew in size. It could cost as much as £1,000-2,000 to set up a sizeable furniture-making firm in the mid-eighteenth century, rising to £3,000 in the 1780s⁷⁴. Ince and Mayhew, for instance, began in 1759 with £1,000 raised equally between the partners⁷⁵ while in 1767 Chipchase and Lambert began with the larger sum of £1,877, of which Lambert contributed £1,302⁷⁶. It remained possible to set up in a small way for much less. John Davis, upholsterer, for instance, set up on his own in Brook Street in 1820 with only £200 capital, part of which was obtained by apprenticeship fees, and a further £100 worth of stock⁷⁷. In the cheap trade, a furniture-maker could set up on his own for much less. Savings of only a few pounds, and even less in some cases, were all that were required for a journeyman to become an independent master in the second half of the nineteenth century⁷⁸.

The capital to start firms came from many sources. When money was not brought in by an outside partner, it mainly came from within the entrepreneur's own family. Occasionally, furniture-makers inherited large sums of money, as in the case of George Else who was heir-at-law of the 'immensely rich' William Else⁷⁹, or James Selby, whose grandfather made 'a very large fortune in business'⁸⁰. Capital also came through marriage settlements. In the 1750s, Richard Seccombe, upholsterer of St. Georges' Hanover Square, married the only daughter of a tobacconist who brought with her a £1,000 marriage settlement⁸¹. Samuel Norman borrowed the 'slender capital' upon which he began his firm about 1753 from his uncle William Hallett, who also loaned Norman's father-in-law, James Whittle, the £700 marriage token given to Norman when he married Ann Whittle in 1755⁸². John Mayhew's wife brought a large sum of money to her husband when they married in 1762 and, widowed within the year, Mayhew used approximately £3,000 of that money

to finance his business. The £7,000 raised by him in the 1770s, by contrast, came when he mortgaged his house⁸³. Not all furniture-makers were as fortunate as Mayhew or Seccombe. The marriage settlement between Edward Snell, upholsterer, and Ann Middleton in 1818 specified that the money left to Middleton by her father should not be touched by Snell, who was guaranteed only £500 for his own use⁸⁴.

Money was also forthcoming from parents as in the case of John Mayhew who borrowed from his father⁸⁵ and John Linnell whose mother altered her will in his favour when he met with financial difficulties in the 1770s⁸⁶. Parents-in-law were also helpful. Robert Kennett borrowed £2,000 from his father-in-law in 1793 but had to agree to pay the interest to his wife⁸⁷. John Davis was more fortunate in that his mother-in-law made him presents of almost £2,000 between 1823 and 1826, which allowed him to expand his business⁸⁸.

Money was raised by mortgaging property, as in the case of John Mayhew mentioned above. In 1770, the premises of George Seddon, insured for £4,300, were mortgaged to the furniture-maker Giles Grendey⁸⁹. Seddon, probably the largest firm in the capital, was financed by large-scale borrowing in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Frank Capell of Nottingham loaned George Seddon £2,800⁹⁰ and, between 1795 and 1801, over £20,000 was advanced to the firm by John Pollard of Bedford Row, father-in-law of Thomas Seddon⁹¹. All went well until George Seddon's death. Thomas and his brother George took over the firm on their father's death in 1801 and a further £7,000 was borrowed from Capell. They ran the firm without major problems because the two major creditors did not press and because the family allowed them to use the £26,000 left by their father to run the business⁹². Once their relatives began to press for the money owed to them from George Seddon's estate in 1803, however, the brothers were unable to meet the demands

and Thomas died in October 1804 shortly before a commission of bankruptcy was awarded against his brother⁹³. The firm's financial problems remained unresolved when George Seddon II died in 1815⁹⁴.

Not all furniture-making firms ran into financial difficulties. Some entrepreneurs made a great deal of money. They remained tradesmen, however, unless they abandoned all connection with commerce and settled on landed estates as gentlemen. To enter the ranks of even the middling gentry cost a great deal in the eighteenth century and few men could amass such a sum in one life-time⁹⁵. A few furniture-makers made considerable fortunes and retired to live as gentlemen. Several furniture-makers either held stocks and shares or were involved in a variety of speculative ventures outside furniture-making⁹⁶ and the returns from such investments must not be forgotten when sources of wealth, other than family, are considered. That the foundations of their fortunes came from their trade, however, is suggested by the fact that several of the leading firms discussed in Chapter 4 produced substantial wealth for their owners.

Gerrit Jensen left a house in the country at Hammersmith but his will of 1715 unfortunately gives few details of his property⁹⁷. When John Gumley died in 1729 he left a considerable fortune as well as Gumley House, Isleworth, to his daughter who had married Lord Bath in 1714, a match which owed something to the lady's beauty as well as to her father's wealth⁹⁸. The upholsterer Dale of Covent Garden made sufficient money to enable him to purchase the estate of the late Viscount Bolingbroke in 1720 for the enormous sum of £50,000.⁹⁹ Little is known about Dale's business but it must have been one of the most successful in the capital. William Hallett purchased the site of Canons, near Edgware, the former house of the late Duke of Chandos, in 1747. Hallett, one of the Duke's creditors, purchased the site and estate together with large quantities of materials from the

house, which originally cost about £200,000 to build and was 'frequently celebrated in verse and prose' but was finally demolished because a purchaser could not be found¹⁰⁰. Defoe commented in 1748 that 'such is the fate of sublunary things, that all this grandeur is already at an end'¹⁰¹ and Horace Walpole's reaction to the purchase of the estate by a mere 'cabinet-maker' was to label it a 'mockery of sublunary grandeur'¹⁰².

The Hallett family appear solidly respectable in a picture painted in the 1750s by Francis Hayman, in which Hallett proudly holds the plans of his new house¹⁰³. Despite Walpole's comments, the new house erected about 1754 was an elegant villa in the Italian style, fronted in Portland stone¹⁰⁴. Although Hallett continued to trade as a furniture-maker until 1767, he sought to preserve the aristocratic connections of his home. His attempts to restore the heraldic symbols on the gate-posts from Canons, however, must have amused the local gentry. Hallett mistook the otters arising out of the ducal coronets for lions and, in his restorations, added lion's tails to the unfortunate creatures¹⁰⁵. Nevertheless, according to his grandson, Hallett won the respect of the neighbouring gentry, and became a local magistrate¹⁰⁶. Five years after his death in 1781, his grandson, a gentleman, who was 'fond of sporting', sold Canons for £10,500 because it was too near London and bought the estate of Little Wittenham in Oxfordshire from Sir Henry Oxendon for £50,000¹⁰⁷, some of which came to him when he married a lady with a handsome fortune¹⁰⁸, and the Halletts were firmly established as country gentlemen.

William Bradshaw purchased land in Lancashire in 1743 to which he managed to retire in 1755¹⁰⁹. Although John Cobb did not retire as a country gentleman, it was his wish that future generations of his family might live as gentlemen as did the heirs of his friend Hallett. Cobb was a wealthy man. In a will made in 1774 he left £12,000 besides property

but within two years his fortune had so altered that he held £22,000 in stocks alone¹¹⁰. Besides this and the considerable stock-in-trade of his business, he owned houses in St. Martin's Lane and Highgate. A glimpse of the style in which he lived is obtained from a reference to his 'chariot and horses' and his white pony¹¹¹. In 1778 Cobb specified a sum of £20,000 that was not to be broken into so that the interest of £600 per annum might 'support the name of Cobb as a private Gentleman'. He stipulated that after the death of his wife the money was to go to William Cobb, the grandson of a close relative, William Cobb of Mallingford in Norfolk. In 1788, however, Hallett intervened on behalf of the eight-year old boy, who found himself in distressed circumstances after the death of his father, in an attempt to get Mrs. Cobb to support him during her lifetime¹¹². By contrast, John Henry Sidgier was more fortunate in that he was able to 'assume the character of a gentleman' immediately after his father Henry Sidgier, cabinet-maker and upholsterer, died in 1786 leaving him well provided for¹¹³.

It was not until after the sale of the family firm that Richard Thomas Gillow entered the ranks of the Lancashire gentry, when he bought Leighton Hall, Carnforth, in the 1820s and the family retired from trade¹¹⁴. Others did not manage the transition from tradesman to gentleman quite so smoothly. William Gomm bought an estate in Oxfordshire between 1747 and 1758, to which he retired. However, he was forced to sell it in 1776 when his son Richard, who had continued the furniture-making firm, went bankrupt¹¹⁵. George Seddon was forced to sell his country estate when he could not meet his commitments after borrowing nearly £3,000 towards its cost¹¹⁶. Similarly, John Linnell was forced to sell land and property in Ealing.

Linnell, who led a colourful and often unconventional life, managed to enjoy the life of a gentleman from time to time when finances and other

circumstances permitted: indeed, he was referred to as the 'Noble Squire' by the father of his mistress, Polly Perfect, the woman with whom he defrauded Lord Conyngham¹¹⁷. Conyngham, who settled an annuity on Polly in 1768, established her in grand style in a house in Edward Street, near Cavendish Square, where she received her lover Linnell¹¹⁸. The lawsuits which ensued after Perfect left her aristocratic protector cost Linnell dearly but, in 1771, his mother altered her will in his favour¹¹⁹. He bought a sixty-one year lease on a house and nine acres of land in Ealing, and owned twenty acres by 1774. By that time, however, Linnell was stretched beyond his means because of the failure of a speculative venture into selling prints in India, which cost him and his partner over £7,000, and had twice mortgaged the property which he was finally forced to sell in 1781¹²⁰. Although the solvency of his estate was in question after his death in 1796, Linnell managed to live quite comfortably in the last few years of his life. He leased a house in St. George's Row in 1793, one in Bath in the following year and a new house in Kensington Gravel Pits, Notting Hill Gate, in 1795, as well as his business and residential premises in Berkeley Square¹²¹. When Linnell did not live beyond his means, he certainly lived up to them. He maintained his way of life at the expense of building up an estate to provide for others after his death, a fact which may be partly explained by the absence of legitimate children who depended upon him for support¹²².

Besides those who are known to have purchased and maintained estates, several other furniture-makers made considerable fortunes by their entrepreneurial activities. As early as 1717, Hibbert, upholsterer, of Bartholemew Close, was reputedly worth £100,000¹²³. Simms and Metcalf, both Quakers who had formerly run upholstery firms, were reputedly worth £50,000 and £160,000 in 1729 and 1740 respectively¹²⁴. Newspaper reports may well have exaggerated the wealth of these men but the very large sums

involved place in perspective the £50,000 paid by Dale for the estate of Viscount Bolingbroke¹²⁵. George Seddon left over £26,000 in 1801¹²⁶ and Thomas Tatham bequeathed £60,000 in 1818¹²⁷. Much of Tatham's money came from a long-standing commission to supply furniture to the royal household as did that of Charles Elliott whose estate realised over £500,000 when he died in 1832¹²⁸. Other furniture-makers left large sums - for instance, William Holland, who was only one of four partners in the firm of Holland, left £140,000 in 1879¹²⁹ - but Elliott is the only entrepreneur furniture-maker whose estate equalled that of the great entrepreneur potter, Josiah Wedgwood, who left approximately £500,000 when he died in 1795¹³⁰.

By no means all entrepreneur furniture-makers were sufficiently successful financially to either buy country estates or bequeath large sums of money. Thomas Chippendale, for instance, lived in what can only be described as a very modest fashion in the later years of his life¹³¹. Entrepreneurs such as Chippendale and Linnell enjoyed a certain social status because they were regarded as artists as well as business men¹³² but few moved out of the tradesman class into which most of them were born.

A few furniture-makers were the sons of gentlemen but none of the well-known furniture-makers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century are known to have come from such a socially-elevated background as the upholsterer Peyton of Covent Garden (fl.c.1744) brother of Sir Yelverton Peyton, Baronet¹³³. Furniture-makers occasionally became personal friends with a member or members of the upper classes but such cases were exceptional. George Nix, cabinet-maker of Covent Garden (fl. 1729-1743), although of humble origin, raised himself to eminence in his profession and was on intimate terms with Lord Macclesfield. This, and his honest and engaging personality, ensured that he was admitted to the 'tables of the great'¹³⁴. A few furniture-makers married outside their own social class. George Cure, an eminent furniture-maker (fl.c.1720-59), for instance, married the

daughter of a Baronet¹³⁵. Such a marriage in itself brought no particular social distinction but remaining in trade afterwards was sometimes a source of embarrassment. John Davis complained in 1825 of the difficulties he experienced because of the snobbish attitudes of friends of his wife, formerly a Miss Packer and 'niece of the Honourable Mr. Thompson', who did not like his being 'in trade'¹³⁶.

For a tradesman was what the entrepreneur furniture-maker remained, even if he had been craft-trained or was exceptionally talented as a designer. When John Linnell, who was very conscious of his own abilities as an artist, attempted to get Lord Uxbridge to settle his account in 1793, he stated, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, that he had never known the Earl to be offended by a 'tradesman's request'¹³⁷. As the craft function disappeared, the entrepreneur who was not also a designer was simply a businessman who made and sold furniture.

Footnotes

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- 5 see p. 109
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- 20 PRO PROB 11 1573 516
- 21 ibid.
- 22 Sir Ambrose Heal, 'The Firm of Seddon. Cabinet-Makers 1756-1868', Country Life, 20 Jan 1924, pp. 72-3
- 23 Helena Hayward and Pat Kirkham, William and John Linnell. Eighteenth Century London Furniture Makers, 1980, vol. 1, p. 30 and Appendix II 31
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- 28 Morning Chronicle, 15 Aug 1850
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- 32 PRO B 3/274
- 33 see following chapter
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- 35 GCM, p. 41 and PRO LC 9/9
- 36 PRO LC 9/9
- 37 PRO LC 9/289 + 290
- 38 General Advertiser, 22 Nov 1746 and Hoare's Bank, Fleet St., Account Sir Richard Hoare, 1731-55. 23 Feb 1754
- 39 PRO LC 9/212 That she was his daughter is confirmed in PRO PROB 11 850 379
- 40 Pinchbeck, Women Workers, p. 283
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- 43 see note 22
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- 45 ibid., p. 30
- 46 ibid., p. 29
- 47 GL. Sun Insurance Records 1770, no. 281644
- 48 Hayward and Kirkham, Linnell, vol. 1, p. 29
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CHAPTER 7

THE DESIGNER

THE DESIGNER

In 1700, much of the furniture made in London was designed by men who were also craftsmen. In 1870, furniture-craftsman and furniture-designer were two separate occupations. The division between craft and design were seen in the London furniture trades as early as the 1750s although the full-time professional designer did not emerge until the very end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was not until the 1860s, however, that such designers were regularly employed by leading West End firms. Throughout the period, some designs were produced by non furniture-makers such as architects and artists. Such designs, though often influential in terms of stylistic developments, were not initiated by the furniture trade and never represented a large proportion of its work. From about 1850, however, architects in particular were among those commissioned as designers by certain leading firms and it was in this way that they began to influence a wider range of furniture designs.

Little is known about the people who designed furniture in the first half of the eighteenth century. Greater attention was paid to the design of furniture and furnishings after the Restoration but the publication of furniture designs, such as occurred on the Continent in the later years of the seventeenth century, did not take place in England. This has led historians to concentrate on well-known architects and artists, whose ornamental designs survive, to the neglect of the craftsmen-designers. The influence of the architect Daniel Marot (1663-1752) on furniture design, for instance, has often been noted¹ but no piece made to his design is known. His ideas were probably translated into English furniture designs by the foreign craftsmen-designers working in England in the later years of the seventeenth century. Furniture and ornamental designs were produced

by William Kent, Henry Flitcroft and other architects in the 1720s and 30s². Furniture-makers such as James Moore the younger are known to have worked to designs by architects but not all furniture was designed by architects³. Indeed, it is likely that, because the leading furniture-designers of the second half of the eighteenth century were brought up in the trade, so too were those of the first half of the century.

There are references in the 1730s to furniture designed by men who ran furniture-making firms and who were probably craft trained. Francis Croxford, cabinet-maker and chair-maker, for instance, was described in 1733 as 'eminent in his profession for his many new and beautiful designs'⁴. Similarly esteemed were Elijah Chupain and Thomas van Hausen, also cabinet- and chair-makers, who produced 'many new and beautiful designs in the cabinet way' in the 1730s⁵. The foreign surnames of the latter two men illustrate the contribution made by foreign craftsmen to design in the first half of the eighteenth century but there is no reason to believe that Croxford was foreign. English cabinet-makers and carvers were taught to draw as part of their apprenticeship⁶ and the more artistic amongst them developed as designers. It was from these two crafts that most eighteenth century furniture-designers came. In 1747, Campbell stated that the young cabinet-maker who could not design and invent new fashions was never likely to become rich or eminent in his chosen profession⁷ and the entrepreneurs of the second half of the eighteenth century realised the importance of fashionable design within the high class trade.

Carvers dominated furniture and ornamental design in the 1740s and 50s. Matthias Lock and Thomas Johnson, who were probably taught design at the St. Martin's Lane Academy, started by Hogarth in 1735, or a similar school such as that run by H. F. Gravelot⁸, produced outstanding designs that displayed the capabilities of furniture-making craftsmen to their fullest.

Lock worked as an independent master carver, either supplying clients directly with goods or working for larger furniture-making firms⁹. From the mid-1740s to the early 1750s, he published six sets of designs useful for wood carvers and also jointly produced another with the engraver, H. Copland. Lock worked as both a carver and a designer and his abilities led the furniture-maker James Cullen to remark that he was 'reputed the best draftsman in that way that had ever been in England'¹⁰. His sometime partner, Copland, worked as both an engraver and a designer but, as Morrison Hechscher has correctly pointed out, both appear to have been designers second, their other work dominating their lives¹¹.

William Linnell, who established his own carving business about 1730, probably executed the design work for the firm before the task was taken over by his son in about 1750¹². His son, John Linnell (1729-1796), who trained at the St. Martin's Lane Academy, was one of the first, if not the first, furniture-makers to receive a design training outside a craft apprenticeship¹³. There is no record of John Linnell's training as a craftsman but references to him as a 'carver' suggest that he was brought up to his father's craft and, therefore, received his design training on top of his craft training¹⁴. If, however, he by-passed an apprenticeship and concentrated on designing, then he was one of the first professional designers, as opposed to craftsmen who also excelled at design, to enter furniture-making.

The standard of the designs of Thomas Chippendale is so high that it is considered that he must have received a training similar to that of Lock, Linnell and Johnson¹⁵. A colony of artists, designers, architects and craftsmen who mixed socially and exchanged ideas, developed in the St. Martin's Lane area in the late 1730s and 40s. There, Chippendale and others could pick up the latest ideas in design whether or not they studied

at the St. Martin's Lane Academy itself¹⁶. John Linnell was brought up in this area in a furniture-making family whose connections illustrate the close contact between artists, architects, designers, craftsmen and entrepreneurs. His father, William, was a furniture-maker who married the daughter of a reputable coach-maker, Samuel Butler. Butler's son, also Samuel, later collaborated with his nephew, John Linnell, in the design of coaches¹⁷. John Linnell was interested in architecture, bequeathing his books on the subject to his god-son John Linnell Bond, the son of John's sister Mary and his father's former apprentice William Bond¹⁸. He taught drawing and design to another young relative, Charles Heathcote Tatham, and provided him with contacts in the architectural profession of which Tatham later became a leading member¹⁹. Tatham's brother, Thomas, worked in Linnell's furniture business and, after Linnell's death in 1796, himself became a successful entrepreneur furniture-maker²⁰. Outside the family, one of Linnell's childhood friends and schoolmates was James Triquet, son of an eminent goldsmith and jeweller. Both boys not only followed their father's lines of business but also became designers²¹. John showed considerable talent as a painter, the occupation chosen by his brother Richard, and counted the artists George Barrett and P.E. Falconet, together with the artistically talented but otherwise misguided engraver William Wynne Ryland, among his friends²².

The efforts of certain furniture-makers to establish themselves in the public eye as designers rather than craftsmen led to the publication of pattern books of furniture and ornamental designs in the 1740s, 50s and 60s. The early pattern books were produced mainly by furniture-making entrepreneurs or independent masters, with Lock, Johnson and Chippendale prominent. Not all craftsmen had the ability to produce their own designs, however, and the scrapbook compiled in the 1750s by Gideon Saint, carver

(fl.c.1750-c.1779), in order to offer his customers a wide variety of designs, illustrates how one London craftsman managed to run a business with a modicum of success without inventing new designs²³. Saint grasped the necessity of offering fashionable designs to customers at a time when the elaborate rococo style was at its height and when novelty was greatly sought after. Apparently unable to design himself - the only drawing by him in the scrapbook is a copy of a design by Lock - he simply offered his clients a choice of designs which were mostly cut out from pattern books, both English and French. He relied mainly on those produced by Lock and Johnson, particularly the latter, both of whom were carvers like himself²⁴. Saint, however, had served his apprenticeship with Jacob Touzey, of the well-known family of carvers, to whom he was bound in 1743 for the not inconsiderable sum of £30²⁵. He was almost certainly taught drawing as part of his apprenticeship but either showed little talent or simply recognised that he was not as able as others. Just how many furniture-makers worked so closely to the designs of others as did Saint is not known but it is unlikely that he was alone, although others might have adapted and altered the designs in a more creative way. Since novel and good designs were an important factor in the success of high class furniture-making firms, it became necessary to obtain those designs from elsewhere if they could not be produced within the firm.

The craft-trained designers of the third and fourth quarters of the eighteenth century were also entrepreneurs. They managed their own firms as well as acting as designers²⁶. At times, however, some were able to spend a considerable amount of their time designing. John Linnell, for instance, was virtually in charge of the design work of the family firm in the years between 1750 and his father's death in 1763²⁷. Similarly, the fact that his father ran the business gave Thomas Chippendale the younger

the opportunity, for a few years at least, to concentrate on design²⁸.

On the deaths of their respective fathers, however, Linnell and Chippendale both assumed full responsibility for running the family firms at the same time as continuing as designers. William Ince, by contrast, was able to spend most of his career as a full-time designer in the firm he established with John Mayhew by means of a division of labour between the two partners whereby, by and large, Mayhew acted as manager and Ince as designer²⁹.

Clients' queries concerning design matters were referred to Ince, who produced the majority of plates in The Universal System of Household Furniture, jointly published in parts between 1759 and 1762 by Ince and Mayhew³⁰. Ince is not known to have had an independent design training such as that enjoyed by Linnell, Lock and others, but he was apprenticed to John West, one of the most eminent cabinet-makers of the 1740s³¹.

The entrepreneur furniture-makers who were also designers competed with those architects who took an interest in furniture design. Robert Adam and John Linnell both submitted designs on equal terms for sofas for the drawing room at Kedleston Hall, Derbyshire in the early 1760s³². On that occasion, Linnell's designs were chosen but on others it was Adam's designs that most pleased clients. The best known example of the rivalry between architect and furniture-maker over the design of furniture is that between the architect William Chambers and Thomas Chippendale in 1774. Chambers, who thought himself 'a very pretty connoisseur in furniture', interfered with Chippendale's designs for furniture at Lord Melbourne's Albany House, London, where Chambers was the architect³³. Chambers was not officially in charge of the design of the furniture but felt himself as competent as Chippendale, if not more so, and persuaded Lord Melbourne of the supremacy of his ideas³⁴.

Furniture-makers such as Thomas Johnson and Thomas Woodin, who

were talented designers with fewer entrepreneurial responsibilities than Linnell or Chippendale, who ran larger firms, also taught drawing³⁵.

Others who were talented at drawing moved out of furniture-making altogether.

Thomas Malton, for instance, a cabinet-maker who ran a business in the Strand in the early 1760s, taught drawing and became an architectural draughtsman. He later published a treatise on perspective³⁶. Edward Edwards became a painter after serving part of an apprenticeship with the firm of Hallett, where his artistic talents had been utilised in the drawing of 'patterns for furniture'³⁷. In 1760, Edwards opened an evening school where he taught drawing to 'several young men who later arrived to be artists, or to qualify themselves to be cabinet or ornamental furniture makers'³⁸. Despite his craft background, Edwards never worked as a journeyman or master furniture-maker and therefore must be considered as a professional artist who occasionally turned his hand to furniture design, such as when he designed furniture for Horace Walpole³⁹.

One of the first full-time free-lance professional designers, as opposed to artists, architects or craftsmen-entrepreneurs, to supply designs to furniture-makers was H. F. Gravelot, the French designer and engraver who came to England in 1737. As stated earlier, he ran a drawing school and produced designs for 'monuments and other antiquities' as well as for silversmiths and furniture-makers⁴⁰. It was not until the late eighteenth century that there emerged a professional designer who concentrated his activities on the design of furniture. Before that date, however, a group of Swedish furniture-makers further developed the ideas of design as a specialist process. Between about 1769 and 1775, C. Furlohg, J.C. Linning and C. G. Martin worked in England, producing marquetry work which they themselves designed⁴¹. They exhibited this work at the Free Society of Artists of Great Britain in the 1770s, indicating that they considered

themselves as artists⁴². Martin specifically referred to himself as a furniture-designer in 1771⁴³ but he was also a working cabinet-maker⁴⁴.

The designs in The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Guide, published in 1788 by A. Hepplewhite and Company, are probably by George Hepplewhite, master cabinet-maker⁴⁵ and founder of the firm, who died two years before the book was published⁴⁶. There is insufficient evidence to prove his authorship, however, and therefore it is not possible to include him with other craftsmen, such as John Linnell, William Ince and Christopher Furlong, who opened the way for the professional furniture-designer.

Thomas Sheraton (fl. 1791-1806), is the first known professional furniture-designer to have made a living, if at times a precarious one, by selling and publishing furniture designs⁴⁷. He had been brought up as a furniture-maker but abandoned his craft for design⁴⁸. Another furniture-designer who was probably also craft-trained was John Richard Taylor, 'designer and upholsterer' who worked for Oakley in the 1830s⁴⁹. During that decade he published two small volumes of furniture and drapery designs as well as designs in Ackermann's Repository of Arts⁵⁰. The extent of Taylor's responsibilities for design within the firm is not known but he was one of the first designers to be employed by a London furniture-making firm. Linnell, Chippendale and Ince, by contrast, all owned their own firm. The only other firm known to have employed professional designers in the first quarter of the nineteenth century was Morel and Seddon of Great Marlborough Street. The partnership between Nicholas Morel and George Seddon was established in 1827 specifically to undertake the furnishing of Windsor Castle, and it was for this work that the designers were engaged⁵¹. It is possible that the 'artist's room' used by them was part of the Seddon family business in Aldersgate Street, because Morel and Seddon utilised the manufacturing capacity of the Seddon firm to produce

the enormous quantity of furniture involved in the Windsor Castle commission⁵², but there is no other evidence to suggest that Seddon of Aldersgate Street employed designers.

George IV was passionately interested in design and furnishings and Morel and Seddon employed four designers of great talent in A.W.N. Pugin, Frederich Bogaerts, F.H.C. Jacob-Desmalter and Jean-Jacques Boileau⁵³. Their royal patron, when he was Prince of Wales, had brought over the Frenchman, William Gaubert, to design ornaments, decoration and furniture for Carlton House⁵⁴, and two of the four designers for the Windsor Castle commission, Boileau and Jacob-Desmalter, were French whilst a third, A.W.N. Pugin, had a French father⁵⁵. Moreover, three of the four had connections with furniture-making or design in one way or another. Pugin had been trained as a designer by his father, who had published furniture designs and with whom in later years he undertook an abortive venture into furniture production⁵⁶. Bogaerts was the son of a celebrated carver, probably Peter Bogaerts, carver and gilder, and he was later described as 'equally happy in his designs for furniture and other branches of interior decoration'⁵⁷. Desmalter, the second son of the famous French furniture-maker Georges Jacob, retired from running the family furniture-making business in 1825 in order to come to England and work on the Windsor Castle commission⁵⁸. Boileau, the only one not connected with furniture-making, was a French artist who had worked in England since the 1780s⁵⁹.

Morel and Seddon not only employed four designers but also design assistants, one of whom was George Dayes, the son of an artist⁶⁰. It proved expensive to hire such people but the parliamentary committee, which examined the bills submitted by the firm and reported to the House of Commons in 1831, struck out charges for drawing and designing on the grounds that 'a manufacturer should be his own designer'⁶¹. This assertion echoed the

customary practice of furniture-makers who did not normally charge for design. It was assumed that the design for a piece of furniture would originate in the establishment in which it was manufactured and the lack of clear distinctions between craft and design in furniture-making meant that the cost of design was included in the overall cost of an item. When an architect designed furniture, however, he was always paid a fee because he was recognised as a professional designer and there was no question of his making it. There are examples of furniture-makers charging and being paid for designs but these relate to particularly important items such as the drawings submitted to George III for the fitting up of a royal library in 1766⁶² and were exceptional.

The decision of the parliamentary committee, in 1831, led to a reluctance on the part of furniture-makers to employ designers, because they could not rely on being able to charge for their work. Nevertheless, furniture-makers such as George Smith, author of three books of furniture designs between 1808 and 1826 who described himself as 'upholsterer and furniture draughtsman to His Majesty and principal of the Drawing Academy, Brewer Street...', continued to teach design⁶³. It was the crusade led by Henry Cole and others to improve standards of design by promoting art manufactures, however, which was mainly responsible for encouraging certain leading manufacturers to reconsider the employment of professional designers⁶⁴.

The problem then became one of finding suitable designers. Concern about the low standard of design in British manufacturing in the 1830s led to the appointment in 1835 of a Select Committee to study the problem. One outcome of the evidence presented on the training of artists and designers was the establishment of a Government School of Design in 1837 with J. B. Papworth, architect, as its Director⁶⁵. The School, the first state-supported Art School in England, aimed to train students to bring art

to manufacture and very soon there were similar schools established in the provinces⁶⁶. While Papworth himself understood some of the problems of manufacture, since he had provided the firms of Snell and Morant with furniture designs⁶⁷, the main complaint levelled against the schools was that they did not produce designers suitable for employment in commercial firms. Messrs. Smee and Son of Finsbury Pavement bought an elaborate design for a carved cabinet from a Mr. Woods of the School of Design in 1845⁶⁸ but such links with furniture-making firms were rare. Mr. Crace, who ran a furniture and decorating firm, stated in 1849 that he had never been able to find a pupil from there who was 'at all perfect in his art, able to assist me in his profession, or to be of essential service in raising the character of taste in manufactures'⁶⁹.

The career of Thomas Seddon (1821-1856), of the firm of Seddon of Aldersgate Street, and his attempts to master the various styles of design and ornament, provides an example of the ways open to a person with some artistic talent who wanted to transform himself into a furniture-designer other than by training at the Schools of Design in the 1840s. Seddon did not have a craft training such as the sons of furniture-makers had received in the eighteenth century. Although he showed early artistic promise at school, he was not encouraged to be a designer by his family and, after school, assisted in the management of the family business, a task which he found uncongenial⁷⁰. His artistic interests were followed only in his leisure time until 1841 when his father allowed him to travel to Paris to study ornamental art for one year so that, on his return, he could provide designs for the family firm. It was in Paris that he fully realised the gap that existed between French and British design. On his return to London he systematically set about improving his abilities as a designer, studying in the library of the British Museum and attending a course in architecture given by Professor Donaldson⁷¹. His efforts were

rewarded when his design for an ornamental sideboard won a prize at the Society of Arts in 1848⁷².

Not all designers could study in Paris, but the exhibitions mounted by the Society of Arts in the 1840s sought to raise the standards of design in British manufactures to something more closely approximating to French standards⁷³. Henry Cole also attempted to improve manufactured goods through his Summerley Art Manufactures scheme in which the firm of Holland was involved⁷⁴. The firm made and exhibited the 'Repose' armchair at the 1848 Society of Arts Exposition and John Bell, sculptor, designed a sideboard for the firm in the following year⁷⁵. Similarly, the firm of John Webb of Old Bond Street, cabinet-maker and upholsterer, manufactured a cellaret in wood which had been designed by John Bell for the same range⁷⁶. Henry Cole and his colleagues may have had little effect on furniture design in general but they helped to change attitudes towards design and designers.

Henry Whitaker, architect and furniture-designer, commented in 1845 on the changing attitude towards design and reported 'brighter days' ahead since the public was beginning to realise that 'many years of hard study in the art of design, and exclusive attention to it, can alone make a designer'⁷⁷. Not every firm was fortunate in having one of its members as dedicated to design as Thomas Seddon, however, and those who wanted to employ designers grew tired of waiting for home-grown products.

The attempts to emulate foreign design by erecting a system of design education similar to that of France and Prussia had less immediate effect on the furniture trade than the direct employment of foreign designers. Jackson and Graham, established about 1840, which imported Parisian paper hangings and other goods⁷⁸, employed the French designer Eugene Prignot in the late 1840s⁷⁹. In 1850, Alfred Lormier, or Lorimer as he was sometimes referred to, was also appointed and these two 'artists of no common order'

headed the firm's design team in the 1850s⁸⁰. The policy was successful commercially: the large amount of business conducted by the firm was attributed to the high standard of its designs⁸¹. The example set by Jackson and Graham and the desire to make a good impression at the 1851 Exhibition encouraged more firms to employ designers, even if only for important exhibition pieces.

Holland, for instance, exhibited a bookcase designed by the architect T. R. Macquoid⁸². He was not in their employ, nor was J. K. Collings, described as 'artist' as well as 'architect', who designed the suite of library furniture shown by the firm at the 1855 Exhibition⁸³. Holland also continued to show faith in the School of Design, which moved to Marlborough House in 1852 and was incorporated into the Department of Practical Art. At the 1855 Paris Exhibition, the firm displayed an ebony cabinet designed by Professor Semper, the German architect and art theorist who taught at Marlborough House⁸⁴, and the carving on a bookcase also shown by the firm was superintended by Mr. Abercrombie, who had formerly been at the School of Design⁸⁵. The artistic arrangement of the carving on a bookcase submitted by the firm of Trollope to the same exhibition was arranged by another former pupil, Richard Beavis⁸⁶, who was later employed by the same firm to design an early Italian-style cabinet for the 1862 Exhibition⁸⁷.

Jackson and Graham are the only firm known to have had designers in their permanent employ in the 1850s. Other leading manufacturers may have wished to employ persons of the calibre of Prignot and Lormier but there was a scarcity of designers, let alone good ones, in the 1850s. The head of the firm of Holland complained in 1856 of the dearth of designers, modellers and draughtsmen⁸⁸. Such designers as there were were considered lacking in taste but could command high wages because of their scarcity⁸⁹. The 1860s, however, saw more firms employing designers⁹⁰. Jackson and

Graham, Gillow, Heal, Clement and Son, Holland, Seddon and Trollope all showed work designed by artists, architects or professional designers at the 1862 Exhibition, the standard of design at which was acknowledged as an improvement⁹¹. It was considered, however, that there was still a great deal which the craftsmen needed to learn⁹². The failure of the Schools of Design, which were never intended for working men, to take up practical issues⁹³ and the failure of the Mechanics' Institutes to attract and hold artisans⁹⁴ meant that there was no institution which offered a talented craftsman an artistic training.

The West End Carvers' Society, which represented the most artistic carvers, in 1848 established a collection of busts, casts and illustrated publications from which its members could work and improve their artistic capabilities⁹⁵. Despite this effort at self-improvement by certain wood carvers, Thomas Seddon's experiences within his family's furniture-making firm confirmed his opinion that French carvers could be considered as artists while English carvers were content to be 'mechanics'⁹⁶. Seddon was an enthusiastic teacher and encouraged his employees to imitate natural forms and work freely from his designs. This proved rather difficult with apprentices trained to carve little more than 'oak and ivy leaves', however, and in 1850 he decided to put into practice a plan which had long been in his mind, that is, the establishment of a drawing school for artisans⁹⁷. Support was difficult to obtain. It was continually pointed out that this task should be undertaken by the Government Schools of Design⁹⁸. It was argued that even if a class was established, working people would not attend and, if by some strange reason they did, they would not appreciate it⁹⁹. Seddon and his artist friends, such as Ford Madox Brown¹⁰⁰, who supported him and offered their services free of charge, pointed out that the Schools of Design had never been intended for working people and that their rules, regulations and stuffy atmosphere intimidated artisans¹⁰¹. Seddon aimed

at a more informal atmosphere where students could come along after work in their ordinary everyday clothes without feeling shame or embarrassment. He finally managed to persuade Professor Donaldson and other influential persons, including Prince Albert who became the institution's Patron, to back his venture which attracted 800 workmen to an initial public meeting held in St. Pancras Vestry Rooms¹⁰². The North London School of Drawing and Modelling opened in 1850 and was well attended. After an initial enrolment of 200, attendance averaged between 100 and 160 and, of the workmen, who were aged between fourteen and forty, there were seventeen wood carvers, fourteen upholsterers, seven cabinet-makers and two gilders¹⁰³. The venture ran into financial difficulties, however, and Seddon himself was forced to give up after a serious illness. The training of artisans was continued in the 1850s and 60s by the establishment of metropolitan art schools which also aimed at training designers. There were ten such schools when the Art Journal reported on the West London School of Art in 1868¹⁰⁴. The number of pupils attending the latter school in that year totalled nearly 500, of whom sixty-seven were classified as 'draughtsmen and designers'; forty-one were wood, stone or ivory carvers; thirty-one were upholsterers; twenty-one were cabinet-makers and nine were modellers¹⁰⁵.

Notwithstanding the problems involved in training craftsmen to execute the designs, the leading furniture-making firms employed designers in the 1860s. It was expensive; new designs added 5-10% to the cost of good quality work¹⁰⁶. William Burges, when discussing the design and manufacture of high quality goods in 1865, stated that most firms employed designers at an annual salary of between £100 and £400, sometimes more¹⁰⁷. Large businesses had their own drawing office with a staff of draughtsmen and they also occasionally commissioned designs from architects or painters, whom Burges considered did not understand the problems of designing for manufactured goods¹⁰⁸. Whereas in the 1850s, the cost of original design

work discouraged leading manufacturers, in the 1860s the employment of designers was considered necessary in order to survive commercially. For those firms which could not afford to pay such costs, the pressure to pirate designs increased. It was expensive enough to have workmen make up new designs, a process which often led to disputes about pricing¹⁰⁹, without the additional cost of paying for the designs themselves. Mr. Drew, who ran a firm in Clerkenwell, for instance, was so keen to reproduce a writing-table shown at the 1862 Exhibition, that he took one of his workmen to the bank in the City where it was situated in order to copy the design. When it was discovered what the pair were up to, they were promptly thrown out¹¹⁰. Despite this episode, the copying of original designs continued unabated.

The respect for the designer which was shown in the 1860s was reflected in frame-making. The extremely large firm of Nosotti, which dominated the frame market, employed a full-time designer, described as an 'artist'¹¹¹. He introduced a great variety of choice, producing many different patterns, whereas previously the customer had been able to choose from only a small number of stock patterns. In 1865, Nosotti's designer was said to be constantly employed in preparing new designs 'on principles approved by the Art School'¹¹². Although he would incorporate ideas suggested by customers into his designs, it was considered wiser to leave him 'to his own taste and his own devices' because, as a designer, he knew best in such matters¹¹³.

The leading furniture-making firms continued to employ designers, whose work once again gained attention at the 1867 Paris Exhibition¹¹⁴. Despite Burges's reservations about the designs produced by persons unfamiliar with manufacturing techniques and processes, architects were employed by leading furniture-makers. Holland was the first firm to employ the architect B. J. Talbert, himself associated with wood carving in his

early days, whose furniture designs were so greatly admired in the 1870s¹¹⁵. His designs won the firm a silver medal at the 1867 Paris Exhibition and, in the 1870s, his services were sought by other leading furniture-makers, including Gillow and Collinson and Lock¹¹⁶. The latter firm also employed the architect T. E. Colcutt¹¹⁷. Jackson and Graham added the Frenchman Thomas Jacob to their design staff in the 1870s when he, together with Prignot and Lormier, headed the firm's extensive staff of designers, design assistants and draughtsmen¹¹⁸. It is not known how many staff were employed in their design department but, in many instances, the cost of design exceeded the cost of manufacture¹¹⁹. Jacob, Prignot and Lormier all earned approximately £700 per annum and, besides this, large sums were also paid to architects and designers, such as Owen Jones, for special designs, the extra cost of which was between £1000 and £1500 per annum¹²⁰. That these sums were not thought unreasonable by Jackson and Graham indicates that the professional designer was not only accepted but was considered a necessary figure in the leading firms of the 1870s.

Such firms no longer relied on craftsmen-designers. Once professional designers were employed, there was no necessity for the owner to be his own designer, and this was one factor in the increased longevity of furniture firms which, when they relied on the individual artistic talents of the owner or partners, rarely lasted beyond two generations. There remained, however, a degree of confusion in contemporary minds as to the relative importance of the designer and the craftsman in the production of a fine piece of furniture. Thomas Seddon had realised that both were necessary and that one without the other did not produce satisfactory results but the ideas of the supremacy of the craftsman lingered on. A sideboard shown by Holland at the Paris Exhibition in 1872 won two medals, one of which went to the manufacturer while the other was stated to be for the designer¹²¹. The latter medal was awarded to the workman who made the

piece, however, rather than to B. J. Talbert who designed it. Despite protests to the contrary, the medal went to the workman but, when his widow sent it to Talbert later in the decade, it was felt that justice had finally been done¹²².

Footnotes

- 1 see Peter Ward-Jackson, English Furniture Designs of the Eighteenth Century, 1959, pp. 6-7
- 2 *ibid.*, pp. 13 and Helena Hayward, 'England 1715-1765' in Helena Hayward, ed. World Furniture, 1965, pp. 129-30
- 3 Christopher Gilbert, 'James Moore the Younger and William Kent at Sherbourne House', The Burlington Magazine, March 1969, pp. 148-9
- 4 LFM, p. 44 and Daily Post 12 July 1733
- 5 Daily Post, 27 July 1739 and General Advertiser, 24 Oct 1739
- 6 see pp. 22 + 55
- 7 R. Campbell, London Tradesmen, 1747, p. 171
- 8 see M. Girouard, 'English Art and the Rococo', parts 1-3 'Coffee at Slaughters', 'Hogarth And His Friends', and 'The Two Worlds of St. Martin's Lane', Country Life, 13 Jan 1966, pp. 58-51, 27 Jan 1966, pp. 188-90 and 3 Feb 1966, pp. 224-7, resp.; Desmond Fitz-Gerald, 'Gravelot and his influence on English furniture', Apollo, Aug 1969, pp. 140-1 and H.E. Hammelmann, 'A French Master of English Illustration. Gravelot's Years in London', Country Life, 3 Dec 1959, pp. 1085-7
- 9 Morrison Heckscher, 'Lock and Copland: A Catalogue Of The Engraved Ornament', Furniture History, vol. XV, 1979, p. 2
- 10 *ibid.*, p. 1
- 11 *ibid.*, pp. 6-7
- 12 Helena Hayward and Pat Kirkham, William and John Linnell. Eighteenth Century London Furniture Makers, 1980, vol. I, pp. 51-8
- 13 *ibid.*, p. 3
- 14 *ibid.*, p. 2
- 15 Christopher Gilbert, The Life and Work of Thomas Chippendale, 1978, vol. I, pp. 5-6
- 16 see Girouard, 'English Art and the Rococo'
- 17 Hayward and Kirkham, Linnell, vol. I, pp. 3 + 58-9
- 18 *ibid.*, pp. 3 + 10
- 19 *ibid.*, pp. 3 + 188-9
- 20 *ibid.*, p. 3
- 21 *ibid.*, pp. 3 + 58
- 22 *ibid.*, pp. 3-8

- 23 Morrison Heckscher, 'Gideon Saint: An Eighteenth-Century Carver and His Scrapbook', The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, Feb 1969, pp. 299-311
- 24 ibid., p. 306
- 25 PRO IR 1/17
- 26 see following chapter
- 27 Hayward and Kirkham, Linnell, vol. I, p. 58
- 28 Ivan Hall, 'The Engravings of Thomas Chippendale, Jnr., 1779', Furniture History, vol. XI, 1975, p. 57
- 29 Pat Kirkham, 'The Partnership of William Ince and John Mayhew 1759-1804', Furniture History, vol. X, 1974, p. 58
- 30 ibid., p. 59
- 31 PRO IR 1/19
- 32 Hayward and Kirkham, Linnell, vol. I, p. 62. see pp. 61-2 for Linnell's relationships with architects.
- 33 Gilbert, Chippendale, vol. 1, pp. 260-1
- 34 ibid., I, pp. 260-1
- 35 Thomas Mortimer, The Universal Director, 1763, and South Carolina Gazette, 29 June 1767 resp.
- 36 Simon Redburn, 'The Furniture Designs of Thomas Malton, 1775-9', Furniture History, vol. XI, 1975, pp. 48-52
- 37 Edward Edwards, 'An Account Of The Life of Mr. Edwards', in Anecdotes of Painters, 1808, p. i
- 38 ibid., p. ii
- 39 DEF, vol. 1, p. 196
- 40 see Girouard, 'English Art and the Rococo', and Fitz-Gerald, 'Gravelot'
- 41 see p. 32
- 42 Hayward and Kirkham, Linnell, vol. I, pp. 65-6
- 43 Martin was described as a cabinet-maker in PRO IR 1/28
- 44 PRO IR 1/28
- 45 PRO IR 1/27
- 46 Happlewhite died intestate. His widow was granted the administration of his estate in 1786. see Joseph Aronson, Introduction to The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Guide, Dover edn. of 3rd (1794) edn., New York, 1969, p. v

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- 48 ibid. and LFM, p. 166
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- 50 ibid., p. 111
- 51 Geoffrey de Bellaigue and Pat Kirkham, 'George IV And The Furnishing of Windsor Castle', Furniture History, vol. VIII, 1972, p. 4
- 52 ibid., p. 11, n. 42
- 53 ibid., p. 6
- 54 ibid., pp. 2 + 6. Gaubert was paid 'For inventing and designing the several ornaments, decorations and furniture and attending the execution of the same at 5 per cent' at Carlton House. PRO HO 73/19
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- 56 Phoebe Stanton, Pugin, 1971, pp. 13 + 195-6, V + A. Prints and Drawings. 94.F.154 Letters, 1 Sep 1831 and Clive Wainwright, introduction to Benjamin Ferrey, Recollections of A.W.N. Pugin and his father Augustus Pugin, 1978 ed. p. xvi
- 57 de Bellaigue and Kirkham, 'Windsor Castle', p. 6
- 58 ibid., pp. 6-7
- 59 ibid., pp. 6-7
- 60 V + A. Library. 86 MM 13. 'A.W.N. Pugin . Notes for an uncompleted autobiography, 1812-1831, with slips of unsigned memoranda' fo. 20
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- 63 Jourdain, Regency Furniture, p. 110 and LFM, p. 171
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- 72 ibid., p. 5
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- 76 Journal of Design, vol. 1, 1849, p. 111
- 77 The Builder, vol. II, 1845, p. 143
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- 79 Elizabeth Aslin, Nineteenth Century English Furniture, 1962, p. 86
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- 81 ibid., p. 187
- 82 ibid., p. 22
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- 118 Pollen, 'Furniture and Woodwork', p. 161
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CHAPTER 8

MACHINERY

MACHINERY

The furniture trade did not, by and large, mechanise the means of production in the years between c.1760 and 1870, the classic years of the 'industrial revolution' when large parts of British industry were transformed. The application of machinery to furniture-making took place on a very small scale in the third quarter of the nineteenth century and is detailed in this chapter. The story of the mechanisation of the furniture-making process, however, mainly lies outside the scope of this study. The application of machinery to the preparatory stages of woodworking reduced the cost of raw materials to furniture-makers but, in general, furniture-makers played no part in either devising or developing these machines. Similarly, they played little part in the invention or development of machines, such as those for jointing or ornamenting wood, which were designed to facilitate the production of furniture.

One of the reasons for the slow introduction of machinery to production was that the tools used in the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth century mostly did their job well and continued to be used throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Entrepreneurs took up invention only when they were estimated to be economically viable and, by 1870, only a few of the leading West End firms had installed machinery which either prepared wood or replaced a part of furniture-making which had previously been done by hand¹. Compared to certain other manufacturers, furniture-makers were slow to utilise steam power in their workshops. In 1871, for instance, the total steam power in furniture workshops was less than 2% of the total in a smaller number of machine-making workshops². In 1870, when Britain was at the height of her supremacy as the workshop of the world, furniture was produced, by and large, by hand.

As far as machinery was concerned, the main developments took

place in the cutting and planing of wood before it reached the furniture-maker. The circular saw, which increased the speed at which wood was sawn into planks, was introduced in the last quarter of the eighteenth century³, when renewed attention was given to the means of production in many areas of manufacture. This, together with the application of steam power to the cutting process in the second decade of the nineteenth century, reduced the cost of sawn timber to the furniture-maker. Prominent in these developments were Sir Samuel Bentham, naval architect and engineer (1757-1831) and Sir Marc Isambard Brunel, civil engineer (1769-1849), both well-known innovators in other fields. Bentham patented a sawing machine with reciprocating action in 1793⁴ and established the first workshop for producing wood cutting machinery⁵. Brunel, who set up his own saw mill, patented a circular saw in 1805, a new method of cutting veneers in 1806 and, in 1812 and 1813, new methods of cutting wood and veneers by steam-driven machinery⁶.

The first steam mill for the sawing of planks was opened about 1814⁷. By 1841, there were fifteen such mills in the London area and the number increased to sixty-eight by 1850⁸. The extent of the mechanisation of wood cutting is indicated by the dramatic reduction in the number of hand wood cutters. By the mid-nineteenth century, sawyers had been 'effectively superseded' by machinery and there was not a single hand veneer cutter in regular employment in the capital⁹.

Although machine-cut veneers were widely used in fancy furniture-making, neither fancy cabinet-makers nor any other furniture-makers were involved in the inventions which greatly expanded the availability of veneers. Once again, engineers played a significant role in the developments: two of the seven patents for veneer-cutting machines taken out between 1806 and 1848 came from engineers, while a third came jointly from an engineer and a machine-sawyer¹⁰. Four provincial furniture-makers patented improved methods of sawing wood by machinery between 1838 and 1847 but the only

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similar patent to come from a metropolitan cabinet-maker was to facilitate the cutting of firewood¹¹.

The application of machinery to planing also reduced the cost of the furniture-maker's raw materials. Bentham, who patented a planing machine in 1791¹², is usually credited with inventing the first planing machine about 1780¹³. An engine for planing boards and fluting columns was patented by a furniture-maker, Leonard Hatton, a Shoreditch bedstead-maker, in 1776, however, but how far it was used is not known¹⁴. Even Bentham's better-known machine was little used, the first effective machine being that patented in 1802 by Joseph Bramah which fixed hand tools to a frame driven by machinery¹⁵. Although Bramah was an engineer he was not unacquainted with the needs of furniture-makers, having earlier worked as a cabinet-maker in Yorkshire¹⁶. Production was speeded up by the introduction of steam power about 1815 but the early machines were crude. Improvements were patented in the years 1838-40 and in 1851 planing machines were used extensively in the construction of the 'Crystal Palace', an undertaking which involved such vast amounts of machine-finished woodwork that the acceptance of such machines was assured once and for all¹⁷.

Furniture-making, however, was not the same as constructing a large exhibition hall. Sawing and planing machines were advantageous only when large and straight pieces of wood were involved (the mills could not produce wood in the enormous variety of lengths, thicknesses and widths as well as the many different types of wood required to make items such as bookcases, cabinets, library-tables, chests-of-drawers, or the host of other items regularly made in furniture workshops) and hand tools remained in use¹⁸.

By the mid-nineteenth century, however, many furniture-makers obtained mouldings direct from moulding mills, the first of which was established in Paddington about 1840¹⁹. Such was the power and efficiency

of the machinery, which produced a wide variety of patterns, that it was no longer worthwhile for a craftsman to execute all but the most elaborate and unusual mouldings by hand. Most mills could cut about six feet of moulding per minute which was a great advance on the productivity of the hand worker and one mill, reputedly the largest in the world, could produce mouldings at the rate of about twelve feet per minute²⁰.

It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that machines were devised to cope with the jointing together of different pieces of wood. A Liverpool builder took out a patent for mortising, tenoning and dovetailing machines in 1849²¹. Two years later, a fancy furniture-maker, H. J. Betjeman, patented a machine to cut 'male' dovetails and mortices²². His invention developed out of his everyday concerns as a fancy furniture-maker: most dovetailing was done on drawers and there was a great deal of drawer-making in fancy cabinet-making. But no other furniture-maker followed the example of Betjeman, who had a general interest in inventions²³. There was little incentive for them to do so because of the high degree of skill in the quality trade and the low cost of labour in the 'cheap' trade.

Mortising and tenoning machines were exhibited at the 1856 Paris Universal Exhibition and at the 1862 International Exhibition held in London. 3,000 small hand tenoning machines made by Powis, James and Company were sold in the years 1852 to 1862 but the extent to which these and other machines were used by furniture-makers is not known²⁵. Furniture-makers showed interest in American dovetailing machines exhibited at the 1867 Paris Exhibition²⁶ but even with the good quality machinery available in Britain in 1872 it was estimated that a skilled craftsman could produce drawers by hand in almost the same time as when a dovetailing machine was used²⁷. A handworker using soft wood could make twenty-four drawers, each six inches deep, in six hours which meant that there was little labour to be saved by the introduction of expensive new machinery. That there was no incentive

to introduce machinery is confirmed by G. W. Yapp in Art and Industry, published in the late 1870s, who noted that, although the machines then in existence could cut dovetails for the very finest cabinet work, this in itself was still not sufficient reason to introduce expensive machinery²⁸.

Only the largest firms with large-scale production, regular orders and considerable capital could consider installing cutting, planing or jointing machinery, when the cost of a single 10 horse-power steam sawing machine was about £700 in the middle of the nineteenth century²⁹. In 1856, the firm of Holland was reported to have all the latest improvements relating to the production process, including mortising and vertical and circular sawing machines powered by a steam engine installed in 1855 at a cost of £1,251³⁰. At the same time, Jackson and Graham had a steam engine and 'machinery for various purposes connected with cabinet-making' which was probably similar to that in Holland's workshops and which was estimated to save in production costs without reducing workers' wages³¹. Some of the larger provincial firms installed machinery in the 1860s³² and when, in 1876, J. H. Pollen discussed the leading London firms, he stated that all the work that could possibly be done by mechanical means was so done³³. The larger half-dozen or so firms all had sawing, planing and jointing machines to cope with basic tasks as well as certain mechanical aids to assist in the more decorative tasks. Jackson and Graham, for instance, had a 40 horse-power steam engine which worked sawing, planing and turning machines and a mortise and tenon machine was under construction in their workshops³⁴.

Hand labour was most expensive when it came to highly skilled decorative work and the renewed interest in ornamental work from the 1820s led to attempts to substitute machines for hand labour. As in the preparatory processes, few furniture-makers were concerned with the new

developments. There was a revival of interest in turning, itself an ancient mechanical craft, in the 1820s and the application of steam power to lathes in London about 1825 doubled productivity and meant that turned ornaments became more widely available³⁵. Steam-powered lathes were used in the 1830s to make 'rosettes' which were then channelled into leaf or petal forms, producing 'a considerable saving in the expense of carving'³⁶ although waste wood between the rosettes had to be cleared away by hand³⁷. The fluting of table and chair legs and other items of furniture such as bed posts was done by the lathe in the 1870s, by which date it had replaced the plane as the means by which ornament was produced by machine³⁸. Turned work still involved the skilled craftsman, however, who could turn legs which were partly square and partly turned without ever losing the correct angle of the work. The power simply speeded up the process which it also made less laborious³⁹.

Another machine which ousted a hand tool without eliminating the skill of the hand worker was the treadle-worked band saw. Shown at the Paris Exhibition of 1855, it was used in the furniture trade in the 1860s, particularly in the East End, for both fret work and curved sawing⁴⁰. By the late 1870s it had replaced the hand fret saw for all but the finest cut decorative work⁴¹. The craftsman no longer had to work the saw as well as cut the wood but it still required considerable skill to guide the wood into intricate patterns⁴².

The idea of reproducing carving and sculpture captivated the minds of those interested in ornamental art: it was the ultimate in the hoped-for fusion between art and mechanics. Once again, however, furniture-makers were not greatly involved in developing carving machines. Only one patentee had any connection with furniture-making prior to the invention of his machine but at least two entered the trade in order to exploit their

inventions and their firms are listed in trade directories beside those where carved work was done entirely by hand. The earliest carving machines were invented simultaneously by James Watt, engineer, whose model was probably based on a lathe for reproducing portrait medallions which he had seen in France, and another gentleman in the first decade of the nineteenth century⁴³. So similar were the inventions that a joint patent was proposed but it came to nought, possibly because of Watt's fears of entanglements arising from the patent laws. A carving machine which appeared in the early nineteenth century, probably some time in the 1820s, so alarmed the master furniture-makers who foresaw a market flooded with cheap carved goods that they ensured that it was never worked⁴⁴. Combination caused by fear in the trade itself was one factor not considered by the Art Union in 1848 when it raised the question of why several carving machines which had been produced both in England and on the Continent since the early nineteenth century had not been adopted commercially⁴⁵. It was assumed that the relationship between the quality of an invention and its adoption by the trade was simple and straightforward. That this was not so is well illustrated by this machine, reputedly more than adequate technically, producing 'beautiful work, at a very moderate expense', which was blacked not by craftsmen but rather by employers fearful of competition⁴⁶.

The great popularity of carving and sculpture in the 1830s and 40s led to efforts to produce commercially viable machines which partially replaced the hand carver. Five patents were taken out between 1843 and 1845. The first, that of the engineer William Irving of Lambeth⁴⁷, was basically a 'bosting and moulding machine' using rotary cutting action⁴⁸. This machine was used commercially by the Patent Carving Company, founded in 1843 by Samuel Pratt Junior, a furniture-maker and dealer in 'ancient furniture'⁴⁹. His interest in innovation was fostered by his father, a patentee of several important inventions, some of which are discussed in

the following chapter⁵⁰. The machine patented by Mr. Cheverton, 'sculptor in ivory', of Camden Town in 1844 resembled that invented earlier by Watt in that it reproduced 3-dimensional miniature versions of full-size models⁵¹. A machine similar to that of Irving was patented in 1845 by George Myers⁵², a builder who was closely associated with the Gothic Revival architect and designer A. W. N. Pugin⁵³. Designed for cutting gothic tracery and mouldings, it was said to cut 'any circular forms with great expedition and perfect accuracy'⁵⁴.

The machine which was eventually to prove most viable commercially was also patented in 1845⁵⁵. It was the invention of Thomas Jordan, a remarkable man whose varied career included being a 'mathematical divider', Keeper of the mining records of the Museum of Economic Geology and a partner in Taylor, Williams and Jordan, the company formed to exploit his invention⁵⁶. Jordan himself was very clear as to the nature of the contribution made by himself and his firm to the development of carving machinery. He denied any claim to be the originator of the idea of carving by machinery but claimed credit for his firm as the first to 'have arranged and brought into successful operation such machinery as is capable of producing, or greatly assisting in the production of, every class of carving, and which cannot fail to effect an immense saving, both of time and money, whenever it is desirable to copy any solid form which the mind of the artist can conceive or his hand execute'⁵⁷.

Jordan paid credit to Cheverton's machine which had been kept secret for some time before it was patented⁵⁸, Cheverton probably registering his invention only after Irving's patent and the threat of more to come. Another machine which resembled that of Cheverton was patented in 1845 by Graziano Conte, a merchant of Regent Street. This produced 'perfect facsimilies of models or casts' and was a 'sculpturing'

as well as a carving machine⁵⁹. There is no evidence that Conte's machine was used commercially or, despite the claim of one writer that Cheverton's machine was 'a particular boon to the ambitious cabinet-maker of the period ornamenting a sideboard with a dozen or more bacchantes, or goddesses of fruits and cereals or similar figures'⁶⁰, that Cheverton's was ever taken up by furniture-makers.

The two machines which vied with each other for supremacy in the 1840s and 50s were those of Jordan and Irving⁶¹. The main differences between the two were that Jordan's could undercut and produce up to eight copies whereas Irving's could produce only one copy at a time and left a larger amount of work to be finished by hand. Both machines required hand finishing, however, and were economical only where large amounts of carved work were required⁶². The New Palace of Westminster was such a place and when, in 1845, Sir Charles Barry considered the provision of large amounts of carved woodwork for that building, he weighed the respective merits of the machines operated by Pratt and Jordan and decided in favour of the latter which could undercut and therefore produced superior modelling⁶³. Both machines were economical: Barry estimated that at the New Palace of Westminster, at least 60% of the cost of hand carving could be saved if Jordan's machines were used and 40% if Pratt's machines were used⁶⁴.

Pratt's 'Patent Carving Works' was in a flourishing state in 1846 with 'many machines in constant operation'⁶⁵. However, Jordan's firm was to be more successful. The latter publicised Barry's sponsorship in its advertising⁶⁶ and won further acclaim when Jordan's invention was awarded the Isis medal of the Society of Arts in 1847⁶⁷. The firm was brought to the attention of a wider public at the Great Exhibition⁶⁸ and, in 1852 Jordan employed 100 men at his 'Machine Carving Works' which had branches in Lambeth and The Strand⁶⁹.

Other processes also aimed at replacing some of the work of the hand carver. The most common were stamped-out leather and wood. Leather work enjoyed some popularity in the 1840s and 50s. Leake of Regent Street patented and manufactured leather imitations of carving, produced after leather was reduced to a gelatinous consistency by steam and the ornament pressed out by a metal die operated by air or hydraulic pressure⁷⁰. Queen Victoria ordered a cabinet from this firm, which also made 'portions of furniture as massive as cabinets and bookcases' together with all manner of ornament⁷¹. The leather could be gilt or painted to resemble oak, in which state it was said to be difficult to distinguish it from wood. Reproductions of antique designs were undertaken; Prince Albert, for instance, had panels made after original carvings by Albrecht Dürer. The work was cheap, durable and less likely to chip than wood which, when painted, it resembled⁷².

Carving was also imitated by several burned wood processes which produced an 'antique' effect by the action of a red hot iron mould applied to wood, although problems arose when too much heat was applied. The Wood Carving Company, established in 1845, had the reputation of producing work as excellent as that of the hand carver at one quarter the cost⁷³. At first, the firm concentrated on large scale carvings and fittings for religious and public buildings but, by the end of 1845, produced a wide range of goods from furniture to smaller items such as envelope cases. Reproduction work was the firm's speciality: its famous Glastonbury chair was featured in the Art Union of 1845⁷⁵. Whilst using old designs for inspiration, the firm endeavoured to foster original design and published a series of designs for carved ornament aimed at architects, builders, and furniture-makers⁷⁵. By 1847, the firm produced 'every description of Gothic or Elizabethan furniture', some of which adorned country mansions up

and down England as well as churches in the West country and the metropolitan area⁷⁶. The Burnwood Carving Company, as its name suggests, used a technique similar to that of the Wood Carving Company. Its 'patent xylopyrography', exhibited in 1851, was mechanised hot poker work using a revolving steel cylinder, heated by gas, on which the design was engraved⁷⁷. This technique was probably also used by other firms such as the Ornamental Pyrographic Woodwork Company of Bow, of which little is known except their names and addresses⁷⁸.

Interest in substitute processes and machinery for carving was enormous by the mid-nineteenth century. Jordan's machine was viewed by many as 'another promise of the unexampled facilities of the coming age in all mechanical resources'⁷⁹, and patent carving firms which produced furniture existed side by side with furniture-making firms which employed only hand carvers. The furniture-makers who, in the 1820s, had feared competition from cheap goods produced with the aid of machinery were proved right. Henry Whitaker, architect and furniture-designer, commented in 1847 on the 'comparatively modest expense' of highly ornamental furniture when the basic decoration was routed out by one of the carving machines⁸⁰. The two largest frame-making firms of the 1860s used carving machines, moulding machines and stamped leather techniques as well as the more popular composition moulding processes⁸¹. The leading comprehensive firms responded by installing carving machines in their own workshops in the 1870s⁸².

In 1870, the largest firms had, or would buy in the next few years, steam-powered cutting, planing, jointing, turning and carving machines. These machines, however, offered few challenges to the handicraftsman. Sawing and planing machines were installed so that the entrepreneur could save money by by-passing the saw mills but they did not affect the furniture-maker. Carving machines saved on some hand labour but the work still

required hand finishing. Turning machines did not eliminate the skills of the turner since only the power source was changed. Similarly, with the band saw the cutting out depended on the skill of the worker rather than the machine. Some jointing and moulding was done by machine, replacing processes that had previously been done by hand but this was the extent of the threat of machinery to the hand worker in 1870. There was little machinery in use in the London furniture trade in 1870. Nevertheless, those machines that were used mark the beginning of the mechanisation of the means of production, of the substitution of machinery for hand power, in furniture-making in London.

Footnotes

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- 7 Henry Mayhew, 'Of The London Sawyers', Letter LIX, Morning Chronicle, 4 July 1850
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- 9 ibid. and 'Of The Moulding, Planing and Veneering Mills', Letter LXII, Morning Chronicle, 25 July 1850
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- 11 no. 12542
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- 13 Richards, Treatise, p. 2
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- 16 Francis Sheppard, London 1808-1870: The Infernal Wen, 1971, p. 175
- 17 Yapp, Art Industry, p. 13
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- 35 Henry Mayhew, 'Of The Turners Of London', Letter LXVII, Morning Chronicle, 29 Aug 1850. Steam turning was in use in 'the manufacturing areas' from about 1815. see also p. 60
- 36 Thomas King, Modern Style of Cabinet Work Exemplified, 1835, caption to plate 9
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C H A P T E R 9

NEW MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES

NEW MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES

If London furniture-makers showed little interest in the development of new methods of working wood, they showed even less in the development of new materials and techniques which were meant to provide substitutes for wood. Developments in brass and iron furniture as well as articles made from artificial materials took place outside the furniture trade, with one exception. That exception was the interest shown by certain carvers in the development of substitute materials used in ornamental work, particularly frames. In an attempt to correct the impression that a large proportion of furniture was made from new materials, such as papier mâché and gutta percha, historians recently have correctly played down the role of such materials in furniture production in the years up to 1870¹. In so doing, however, the importance of these materials to the ornamental side of the trade has not been sufficiently emphasised.

The future of wood carving was threatened from the mid-eighteenth century by the development of papier mâché and a variety of patent compositions (putty-type mixtures usually made of materials such as whiting, resin, glue and linseed oil). The development of these substances in England is obscure but as early as 1672 it was suggested that ornaments for picture-frames could be produced in papier mâché² and, in 1693, a patent was taken out for an artificial wood³. William Wilton, a plasterer who produced a composition known as 'fibrous slab', is usually credited with pioneering the production of papier mâché in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century⁴.

As regards furniture, papier mâché was used mainly for the ornaments on frames but some carved work on the knees of chairs was also executed in the new material. In either case, pieces of moulded papier mâché were glued on to the wood and were then hand-finished by carvers in the same

way as if they were wood. Costs were reduced because there was less material to be worked, the papier mâché being moulded as close to the desired shape as possible before attachment to the frame or chair⁵. The popularity of elaborate carving in the 1740s and 50s, with the ascendancy of the rococo style, brought renewed efforts to perfect papier mâché and compositions. The main motive was economic: in the second half of the eighteenth century, composition ornaments were claimed to be at least fifty per cent cheaper than wooden ones⁶. It has been argued that aesthetic considerations were also important because designs which would have defied the skills of a plasterer or wood carver could be executed in the new materials⁷. This may have been the case with the odd very elaborate design but there is no evidence that most designs executed in papier mâché or composition could not have been carried out in the traditional materials of wood or plaster.

Certain wood carvers realised not only the danger to their craft from the new materials but also the financial rewards to be gained by those in the forefront of the developments. The carver and gilder Duffour, of Berwick Street, Soho, who in 1749 was famous for his 'paper ornaments like stucco'⁸, claimed to be the original maker of papier mâché⁹. His French surname suggests that he may have brought to England knowledge and skills from France, reputedly the place of origin of papier mâché. The French carver Peter Babel also manufactured papier mâché in London in the 1760s¹⁰. It was the activities of members of his own craft, such as Duffour and Babel, that aroused the francophobia of Thomas Johnson, one of the leading carvers of the mid-eighteenth century¹¹: a design by Johnson, dedicated to the Grand-President of the Anti-Gallican Association, incorporated a cherub setting fire to a scroll inscribed 'French Paper Machee'¹².

The threat, however, came not from the origins of the substance or

the nationalities of the manufacturers, but in the quality and quantity of moulded ornament produced. Despite Johnson's patriotic defence of wood carving, papier mâché was used extensively for decorative work, particularly frames, in the 1750s and 60s. Furniture-making firms bought in papier mâché goods. Even Linnell, with a reputation for high quality carving, had a few papier mâché items, such as gilt ornaments for a bed and a set of bed cornices, in stock in 1763¹³. Similarly, the firm of Chippendale bought papier mâché room borders¹⁴ but the main decorative items in both shops continued to be hand-carved in wood.

There seemed little to seriously worry the skilled frame-carver in the 1760s. The continued improvements in the manufacture of papier mâché, the development of a wide variety of compositions in the 1780s (only one of which was patented by a carver)¹⁵, and changes in taste, whereby elaborate carving lost much of its popularity, however, meant that the position of the hand worker was seriously threatened in the late eighteenth century. Artificial materials were so widely used by the early nineteenth century that the craft of wood carving was said to be virtually extinct¹⁶. Furniture-makers bought in items such as cornices, scrolls for cabinet and table legs, bedstead canopies and, above all, frames¹⁷ from firms such as Jackson (founded about 1780 by a wood carver who carved moulds for Robert Adam¹⁸), Bielefeld and Haselden¹⁹, which were specialists in either papier mâché, composition or both, and did not produce or sell general household furniture.

When wood carving was revived in the 1820s and 30s, frame-making continued to be mainly carried out in artificial materials if machine-cut wood mouldings were not used. With papier mâché and composition frames estimated to cost only between one half and two thirds of hand-carved wooden equivalents²⁰, it is not surprising that the new materials, which could be gilt or coloured in imitation of oak, walnut or any other wood as desired,

increased in popularity. Despite claims by optimistic inventors, however, the new materials were not suitable for cabinets and other large items of furniture which needed wood or metal supports for stability.

The possibility of replacing wood with papier mâché or composition for larger pieces of furniture had interested papier mâché manufacturers since Henry Clay first produced furniture made of papier mâché with wooden supports in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century²¹. It was not until a series of improvements between 1836 and 1851, whereby tougher materials were produced, panels were moulded onto wood supports and steam power applied to improved moulding techniques, however, that it became possible to produce not only larger items, such as sideboards and bookcases, but also items which were subjected to heavy use, such as chairs and tables²². Even so, another material, usually wood or metal, was still needed to supply strength. Furniture-makers took no part of these attempts to develop substitutes for wood: the initiatives came, not surprisingly, from papier mâché manufacturers themselves, engineers interested in applying machinery and steam power to the production process, and a few amateur 'gentlemen'²³.

The firm of Jennens and Bettridge of Birmingham and London, successors to Henry Clay and the largest manufacturer of papier mâché in the world in the nineteenth century, spent many years attempting to perfect the material as a substitute for wood in furniture production. They used the stronger type of papier mâché made from paper sheets dried over metal moulds which had been developed by Henry Clay but, in the end, recognised that, in order to withstand the wear and tear of everyday life, most papier mâché items needed reinforcing with wood or metal supports²⁴. That they employed cabinet-makers to transform their tough paper panels into pieces of furniture, however, indicates the extent to which papier mâché was substituted for and worked as wood²⁵. The firm formed part of the metropolitan furniture trade,

although papier mâché products never constituted a very large proportion of furniture made in London. In 1849, their products included a variety of items such as cabinets, chiffoniers, secretaires, writing-desks and sofa-tables that had hitherto been the exclusive province of the furniture-maker as well as smaller items such as tea chests, tea caddies and work boxes which directly competed with fancy cabinet work²⁶.

The Great Exhibition of 1851 displayed not only papier mâché furniture but also certain pieces made in composition. The items were small lightweight pieces, such as tables and workboxes, and it was emphasised that even those should be regarded as models rather than finished pieces²⁷. Such small items competed with the fancy cabinet-making trade but the savings in cost achieved by using artificial materials could not match those achieved by the division of labour, cheap veneers and low prices in the 'slop' end of the trade. Within fancy furniture-making, therefore, wood remained the main material used²⁸. Despite the publicity given to papier mâché and compositions, particularly at the international exhibitions of 1851 and 1862, these materials never seriously threatened to replace wood in furniture-making and remained best suited to ornamental items such as frames and cornices.

Carton pierre²⁹, Albano's Patent Canabic Composition³⁰ and other artificial materials competed with papier mâché in the production of ornamental items in the mid-nineteenth century but the artificial material which most impressed critics at the Great Exhibition of 1851 with its potentiality for decorative work, however, was gutta percha³¹. A latex substance, highly ductile at high temperatures and which turned extremely hard on cooling, it proved virtually indestructible. It could be rolled or moulded, patterns could be reproduced crisply and faithfully, it was easily tinted and lent itself well to polishing³². Popularised in the 1840s,

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it was used for pen-trays, inkstands and other small items³³ and offered a greater potential threat to the fancy trade than did any other artificial material. A patent taken out in 1849 for bedsteads included supporting laths which were made in gutta percha³⁴, and its strength meant that it was also used for larger pieces of furniture. Items such as ornamental tables and mirror-frames were made in the new substance because it was in ornamental work that the greatest savings over hand work could be achieved. Furthermore, it was superior to papier mâché not only because it was tougher but also because it gave crisper detailing, although one critic noted cracks and discolouration on a sideboard shown at the Great Exhibition³⁵. It was estimated that it was cheaper than composition³⁶ and, if widely used, would have cost only as much or a little more than papier mâché. However, the supremacy of gutta percha was never established. The supply of gutta percha, which was always limited, was by 1876 so severely curtailed by a shortage of the latex used in its manufacture that its commercial production was no longer viable³⁷. This material, which might have offered a serious challenge to wood, therefore, was never fully developed.

Metal, usually either cast iron or brass, was used instead of wood in the production of certain items of furniture in the nineteenth century. The durability of metal was its greatest advantage over other substitutes for wood, and improvements in casting meant that by the 1830s it was cheaper to produce intricate ornament in cast iron than in wood³⁸. The main disadvantages of cast iron, however, were its weight and a liability to fracture. Iron furniture could be painted in imitation of wood but the deception ended when the article was lifted. Although certain items of domestic furniture, such as dining chairs and bedsteads, were made from it, cast iron was usually reserved for pieces which were not frequently moved, such as hall chairs and sideboards, but even then the weight and

brittle nature of the material proved a barrier to its general acceptability³⁹.

It was in the production of bedsteads that metal came to be widely used in furniture-making. The early cast iron bedsteads proved too heavy and brittle but the use of hollow metal tubes brought about the production of metal bedsteads, usually of brass or iron and brass together, on a large scale. Although some of the innovatory ideas came from the London furniture and camp equipage trades⁴⁰, the production of metal bedsteads was firmly established in Birmingham, the centre of the metal industries, from the 1840s when metal bedsteads were produced on a large scale⁴¹. By 1875, the demand was so great that almost 6,000 per week were produced in the Birmingham area⁴². Although about half of those were exported, the remainder were sold on the domestic market, competing with the wooden bedsteads made and sold by furniture-makers.

Substitutes were sought not only for wood but for other expensive materials used in furniture-making. Marble was considerably reduced in price after steam-driven cutting machinery was perfected in the 1830s, and the rejuvenation of the Derbyshire industry in the 1840s and 50s led to a plentiful supply of good quality marble for furniture-making⁴³. Slate was used as a substitute for marble. It was topped with painted glass, japanned or decorated by a process similar to that used in book marbling and, despite the ease with which it broke, was used on a variety of items of furniture in the years between 1830 and 1870⁴⁴. Mirror glass was one of the most expensive materials used in furniture-making until the 1840s when improvements in its manufacture led to a reduction in price of about one-sixth⁴⁵. The repeal of duty in 1845 and keen competition brought down prices even further; a glass measuring 50" x 40" which sold in 1770 for over £60 could be obtained for £8 in 1846 and, by 1865, it was as cheap as four guineas⁴⁶. Such prices partly account for the popularity of large looking-glasses and mirrored

sideboard backs from the 1840s.

There was also some reduction in the cost of metal ornaments and fittings for furniture. London furniture-makers, who bought supplies from brass-founders in either London or Birmingham⁴⁷, were not involved in these developments. In 1769, a London gilt 'toy' manufacturer, John Pickering, patented a process for stamping ornament on sheets of metal that were then mechanically rolled⁴⁸. His patent specified coffin furniture and coach ornaments but the 1777 patent of two Birmingham brass-founders, Marston and Bellamy, which improved Pickering's process, included cabinet furniture⁴⁹. Matthew Boulton, himself a 'toy'-maker, used stamping machinery in the 1770s to apply the ornament to brass and ormolu items, some of which were probably used to decorate furniture but, despite the suitability of stamped ornament to flat items, such as back-plates for handles, most metal furniture fittings were cast rather than stamped⁵⁰.

The search for substitutes for stuffing was a major preoccupation in upholstery. Stuffing was a central task in the upholsterer's craft, but furniture-makers did not involve themselves in devising alternative materials or techniques. Accounts of such developments usually focus upon spiral springing, which is discussed as part of the move towards greater comfort, with 'Victorian' heavily-stuffed furniture cited as examples⁵¹. The interest in substitutes for stuffing, however, pre-dates the move towards bulkier and more heavily upholstered furniture in the 1820s and 30s. A substitute for horse-hair was patented in 1806⁵², while in 1813 and 1816 patents were taken out for air-filled cushions and beds. John Clark, a grocer of Bridgewater in Somerset, patented his invention of air-beds, pillows and cushions made from caoutchouc, i.e. raw uncultivated rubber, using an air pump to fill the mattresses, in 1813⁵³. He was followed three years later by an engineer, Samuel Pauly, of Knightsbridge, who also patented

a seamless substance which could be filled with air⁵⁴. The advantages of such air-beds were many. They were light, portable, resistant to damp, did not go lumpy, could be soft or firm and even warm or cold. They could also be filled with water or other fluid. Despite the adaptation of Clark's idea by a physician who used improved rubber produced by Macintosh and Company to produce a water or 'hydrostatic bed for invalids'⁵⁵, there is no evidence that air or water beds were ever used on a large scale in hospitals or by travellers, let alone in domestic interiors. Problems in maintenance meant that they could not compete with the stuffed mattress, particularly after the introduction of spiral springing.

The spiral spring patented by Samuel Pratt, camp-equipage-maker, in 1826 and 1828⁵⁶, is regarded as the basis from which Victorian sprung upholstery developed, but the technical knowledge necessary for the construction of the spiral spring was known before then. Indeed, it was known to furniture-makers. Spiral springs featured in a patent of 1769 for the 'better construction of wheel carriages'⁵⁷ and the coiled springs used by Cobb and other West End firms in the 1770s in gymnastic chairs or 'chamber horses', designed for indoor exercise, were similar to those later patented by Pratt⁵⁸. Thomas Sheraton discussed the springing of chamber horses in 1793 but it has been suggested that, because he did so in the detail normally reserved for a new invention, it was not widely known amongst furniture-makers⁵⁹. It is possible that the manufacturers of gymnastic chairs guarded the technique of springing from would-be competitors. However, the general lack of awareness of spiral springing is confirmed by Loudon who, writing forty years after Sheraton, stated that although the application of spiral springing to upholstery had long been known to men of science, it was so little known to furniture-makers that it had recently been taken out as a new invention⁶⁰.

Pratt, as a camp-equipage-maker and patentee of a wardrobe-trunk for

travellers⁶¹, understood the construction of certain types of furniture. However, it was his concern to produce comfortable items for travelling which led him to recognise and develop the potentiality of springs to allow elasticity not only to the frames of furniture but also to cushions. He produced items of furniture using the spiral spring and was referred to as an 'upholsterer' when, in 1830, he supplied goods to the royal household. These included spiral sprung mattresses and cushions, together with easy chairs and bedsteads, one of which came complete with mahogany carved lion's paw feet⁶². Spiral springs were widely used for mattresses, cushions, easy chairs and other seat furniture in the 1830s when the furniture trade was supplied with such items 'by the hundred weight' from Birmingham⁶³.

Compared with engineers, brass-founders, papier mâché manufacturers and others, furniture-makers were not greatly involved in the development of new materials and techniques which, in one way or another, affected the production of furniture. Those few furniture-makers who were involved were entrepreneur carvers whose role in developing substitutes for wood carving put journeymen carvers out of work. Furthermore, one of the most significant developments as far as the comfort of furniture was concerned, the spiral spring, was developed by someone outside the furniture trade, although he was closely associated with it. Those furniture-makers who were most concerned with innovation involved themselves with much smaller improvements in areas of direct and immediate concern to them as furniture-makers. The ways in which they did this are the subject of the following chapter.

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- 3 no. 317
- 4 Wills, op. cit., pp. 138-9 and Shirley Spaulding De Voe, English Papier Mâché of the Georgian and Victorian Periods, 1971, p. 3
- 5 Jane Toller, Papier-Mâché in Great Britain and America, 1962, p. 16
- 6 R.W. Symonds, Furniture Making in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century England, 1955, p. 158
- 7 Wills, op. cit., p. 142
- 8 Lady Llanover, ed. The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany, 1861-2, vol. II, p. 532, quoted in Wills, op. cit. p. 140
- 9 LFM, p. 50
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- 14 Christopher Gilbert, The Life and Work of Thomas Chippendale, 1978, vol. I, p. 48
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- 16 see pp. 56-7
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- 21 De Voe, Papier Mâché, p. 28
- 22 Aaron Scharf, Art and Industry, Bletchley, Bucks, 1971, pp. 25-6

- 23 Papier mâché manufacturers patented nos. 10653, 10935, 11289, 11670, 12175, and 13531 and engineers nos. 9261, 9953 and 13603
- 24 De Voe, Papier Mâché, pp. 47 and 176
- 25 ibid., p. 70 and Toller, Papier-Mâché, p. 30
- 26 Toller, op. cit., p. 85
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- 33 Collins, op. cit., p. 69 and George Dodd, Novelties, Inventions, and Curiosities in Arts and Manufactures, 6th ed., 1860, pp. 138-9
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- 37 Scharf, Art and Industry, p. 24
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- 39 ibid., and Aslin, Nineteenth Century English Furniture, p. 45 and Elizabeth Aslin, 'The Iron Age of Furniture', Country Life, 17 Oct 1963, pp. 936-7
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- 42 Aslin, op. cit., p. 44
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- 47 see PRO B 3/43, 274, 504, 1421, 2011, 2012, 2964, 4073 + 4464
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- 52 no. 2949
- 53 no. 3718. Loudon, Encyclopaedia, p. 337
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C H A P T E R 10

PATENTS

PATENTS

Furniture-makers were not greatly concerned with either the mechanisation of preparatory woodworking processes or with attempts to develop new materials or techniques which affected furniture-making. The areas of innovation in which members of the trade were most involved were comparatively mundane and related more directly to everyday workshop problems and the need to produce novel designs. The patents concerning furniture-making indicate the pre-occupations of furniture-makers and others in the years after 1760 when patents concerning furniture were taken out with increasing regularity.

Between 1700 and 1853, 255 patents for furniture were taken out¹. Only one invention was patented in each of the first five decades of the eighteenth century but the figures rose to seven in the 1760s and to thirteen in the 1770s. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, sixteen patents were taken out and the following three decades saw the figures at between thirty-three and thirty-seven. In the 1840s, the rate of increase accelerated and 115 patents were taken out. The patents concerned with furniture increased at roughly the same rate as patents in general² and reflect a widespread interest in innovation and novelty. They were, however, only rarely concerned with machinery or improvements in materials and techniques, features associated with the 'industrial revolution'. The exceptions were the development of metal bedsteads, spiral springing and papier mâché furniture, areas in which furniture-makers themselves showed least interest. The roots of many patents concerning furniture lay in the widespread interest in novelty and innovation that was common in Britain and certain other European countries from about 1760 onwards³, improvements in medical science⁴ and the demands of travellers and invalids.

It has been argued that furniture-makers involved themselves in the

technological advances in materials and techniques associated with the 'industrial revolution'⁵ but, with few exceptions, this was not so. Whilst the patents themselves have recently aroused the interest of historians, the occupations of those taking out the patents have been ignored. The majority, indeed over three-quarters, of patents for furniture were taken out by non furniture-makers (Appendix II, Table 1). When discussing patents, Edward Joy stated that 'furniture craftsmen were as concerned as craftsmen in other industries with new devices, substances and constructional methods'⁶. This is incorrect because of both the suggestion that furniture craftsmen were extensively involved in patents concerning their own work and the implication that innovation in furniture-making was similar to that experienced in other industries, such as metal or engineering. Just under 30% of patents for items of furniture traditionally made in wood and 17% of those for upholstery were taken out by furniture-makers (Appendix II, Table 2). Of the furniture-makers, the majority were entrepreneurs rather than working craftsmen. Most came from London, predominantly from the West End (Appendix II, Table 2). It would appear therefore that of the furniture-makers involved, it was their position as entrepreneurs rather than craftsmen which encouraged them to develop or patent inventions or processes.

The predominance of non furniture-makers among the patentees indicates not only that outsiders took a greater interest in developing new ideas and applying them to furniture production than did members of the trade but also that some of the new inventions resulted from advances made in other industries. Patents for furniture originated from people in a wide variety of occupations, with brass-founders and engineers predominating, and gentlemen amateurs and the wide but rather ill-defined categories of 'merchant' and 'manufacturer' providing the next largest single groupings⁷. Brass-founders, for instance, were involved in improving metal bedsteads, the

main new area of furniture production involving the use of a non-wood material. They, together with engineers, also took a special interest in castors and fastenings and their concern with upholstery centred on mechanisms for drawing curtains and blinds.

Twenty-three patents were taken out in the years 1811 to 1851 for castors, all made entirely of metal. Before this, castors had been made of wood or of wood with brass rollers⁸. Ten patents came from brass-founders, nine of whom worked in Birmingham while the other worked in London⁹. According to J. C. Loudon, the best castor available in 1833 was that produced by Cope of Birmingham, himself not a patentee¹⁰. Not all London furniture-makers were entirely satisfied with the castors available to them, however, because in the following year James Lutton, chair-maker of Tudor Road, Tottenham Court Road, patented a castor in which weight and pressure were more evenly distributed¹¹. Despite the fact that the castor was of considerable importance in the production of easily moveable and comfortable seat furniture, the only other furniture-maker to patent an improvement was Francis Kane, who had almost certainly been a mechanic before he set up as a chair manufacturer¹². Apart from brass-founders, others involved in the improvement of castors included manufacturers of pianofortes, the weight of which demanded reliable castors, two engineers and a mechanic.

The majority of patents concerning improved mechanisms for window blinds were taken out by brass-founders, engineers and blind manufacturers¹³, but three out of the four patents concerning window curtains were taken out by upholsterers. Two patents came from Israel Lewis of Fleet Street, in 1776 and 1777¹⁴. The first was for window curtains with springs so that they could be taken up and down without the assistance of an upholsterer and the second was similar but applied to festoon window curtains. The other upholsterer was James Small of Westminster who, in 1777, invented a window lath to which curtains could, once again, easily be fastened without the

assistance of an upholsterer¹⁵. The only other patent to deal with the fastening and hanging of curtains was that registered in 1803 by an Edinburgh bell-hanger, whose improvements in the hanging of bells also applied to window curtains and window and other blinds¹⁶.

The items with which furniture-makers mostly concerned themselves were tables, fastenings (the majority of which could be used for tables), chairs, general cabinet ware and bedsteads (Appendix II, Table 1). Furniture-makers constituted 50% of the patentees in only one category of patents, that relating to tables (Appendix II, Table 1). The only patent concerned with tables in the years before 1800 came from Anthony George Eckhardt, F.R.S., a gentleman from London, who in 1771 invented a portable table and chair which packed away into a small box and were claimed to be of great use to travellers, particularly members of the armed forces¹⁷. Between 1800 and 1850, however, twelve patents were taken out concerning extending dining-tables. These could, at the turn of a suitable mechanism, extend from seating about four persons to seating up to twenty. It was to this piece of furniture more than anything else that London furniture-makers turned their attention.

The mechanisms used to make the tables extend were relatively simple. In 1802 Robert Walker, cabinet-maker, patented the use of adjustable claws on dining-tables so that they might take up less room¹⁸. Richard Gillow's solution of 1800 was to use wooden or metal sliders or grooves so that the tables could be extended and held without extra legs or pillars and claws¹⁹. By contrast, Richard Brown, cabinet-maker of Bishopsgate, and George Remington, also a cabinet-maker, of Bloomsbury, both used, in 1805 and 1807 respectively, a system of lazy tongs whereby the extending scissor-like parts supported the table from underneath.²⁰ Only one non furniture-maker patented an extending dining-table. He was William Doncaster, a gentleman of Charles Street,

Cavendish Square, whose invention involved the use of hydrostatic bellows²¹. The furniture-makers involved gave their occupations as either cabinet-maker, or cabinet-maker and upholsterer, indicating that they were either cabinet-makers by training or ran businesses including cabinet-making, a major aspect of which was the production of tables.

Of the patents for tables which were not concerned with extending dining-tables, three originated with furniture-makers. In 1786, William Cairncross, a cabinet-maker of Greek Street, Soho, patented the use of iron and brass screws on the inside and underneath parts of furniture, particularly at the joints of table legs and chair rails²². In 1844, Alexander Ram patented his dining-table which transformed itself into a billiards-table²³ and, two years later, George Riddett, an upholsterer from the Isle of Wight, patented his improved construction for reading-tables²⁴. Expertise from other trades was also brought in. A system of sliding hinges used in the construction of shutters, which could also be applied to tables, was patented by two carpenter and joiners in 1794²⁵. Two patents, one in 1809, the other in 1827, dealt with portable tables which were easily packed for travelling, the latter being taken out jointly by a naval lieutenant, who knew the usefulness of compact goods to the armed forces, and a tin-plate worker²⁶. Another metal worker, whose patent included table construction, was John Cowley of the Patent Welded Iron Tube Works of Walsall who, together with John Hickman, clerk of Aston, patented his developments in tubular hollow sliding tubes in 1849 but they were relevant mainly to chair and bedstead-making²⁷.

Apart from portable tables, which were important in the area of travel furniture, the main developments were undoubtedly those concerning extending dining-tables and came from furniture-makers themselves. It is not surprising therefore that some of these patents were taken up fairly

quickly in the trade. By 1815, after nine patents in the preceding fourteen years, extending dining-tables had become such a regular part of the cabinet-maker's work that a special supplement to the piece-rate book to which London journeymen worked was issued especially for such items²⁸. Richard Gillow's invention of 1800 became one of the firm's best-known pieces²⁹, and William Pocock's patent of 1805 was translated into the 'Patent Sympathetic Table', seating from four to twelve persons and was manufactured in considerable numbers³⁰. Extending tables remained popular for many years: in about 1880 the grandson of William Pocock commented that the telescopic dining-tables pioneered by his forefather were then very common³¹.

After tables, the type of innovation which involved the next highest proportion of furniture-makers was fastenings, the majority of which could be applied to tables (Appendix I, Table 1). The same fastenings often also applied to window sashes, indicating that they were relatively small locking devices. Only eleven patents were taken out in the years up to 1850 and of those only five were taken out by furniture-makers, four of whom were from London. The other six patentees comprised two gentlemen, a carpenter, an ironmonger, a brass-founder and a mechanic. The earliest patent was that taken out in 1786 by William Cairncross, cabinet-maker in Greek Street³². His metal screws to secure joints on chairs and tables, discussed earlier³³, arose out of the problem, common to all furniture manufacturers, of ensuring strength of construction in items subjected to heavy usage. The other furniture-makers all took out patents involving fastenings for tables, particularly dining-tables, which were a matter of practical concern in furniture production³⁴.

The brass-founder and ironmonger, whose concern with metal fastenings needs no explanation, both patented devices which could be applied to tables³⁵. Fastenings for bedsteads and other frames were

patented in 1842 by Francis Kane, a mechanic of Cumberland Street, Middlesex Hospital³⁶. It is the patent of the carpenter, Day Gunby of Cross Street, Hatton Garden, taken out in 1798 for a system of weights, bolts and springs used to operate rising parts on desks, tables, chairs and other items, however, which is best known³⁷. It was taken up and used by Seddon in a desk constructed with a system of concealed lead weights which enabled the user to raise either a reading desk with two drawers and candle rests or a small nest of drawers and pigeon holes from the top of the desk by simply pulling cords³⁸.

Approximately one third of the patents concerning chairs were taken out by London furniture-makers (Appendix II, Table 1). A major advance in chair production came with the development of the easy chair, designed a mechanism facilitating various reclining positions, which itself derived from earlier developments in the field of invalid furniture. The latter consisted mainly of beds and seat furniture which could easily be moved into different positions for the better comfort of the patient and the convenience of those nursing them and, not surprisingly, medical persons and furniture-makers were prominent in developing such items.

The first patent for invalid furniture was taken out in 1766, when Henry Sedgier, cabinet-maker, and Robert Dickinson, upholsterer, both of London, submitted their inventions for a bedstead, the position of which could be altered by a winch mechanism³⁹. The same mechanism also turned the bed into a settee for those occasions on which the patient was feeling better. Henrietta Caroline Bentley was the next to take out a patent. Her invention of 1794 was a bed that could not only move into different positions but could also be made up 'without incommoding the patient' by means of an outer frame, operated by a small winch which raised the invalid above the inner bed frame which contained the mattress⁴⁰. Bentley is simply described as a spinster

from Southampton and it is likely that her invention arose out of personal experience of the difficulties involved in the care of sick or elderly members of her own family. The patent which made most impact commercially, however, was that taken out in 1800 by William Pocock for 'raising, lowering and moving heavy bodies'⁴¹. The mattress and frame which he subsequently produced was termed the patent 'boethema' mattress, the name itself implying succour and relief to those in pain⁴².

In the second half of the eighteenth century, great improvements were made in medical science and there was a general concern for the welfare and well-being of invalids⁴³. The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1793-1815, which brought about an increase in the number of military invalids, provided the main impetus behind the increased number of patents concerning the care and comfort of invalids from about 1810 onwards. In that year a surgeon's instrument-maker from Sheffield, together with a silver-plater, patented an adjustable bed-frame⁴⁴. Two years later, George Paxon, an upholsterer from Hampstead, patented a bed which could be moved into ten different positions⁴⁵ and, in the following year, another medical person, Samuel James, a surgeon from Hoddesden, Hertfordshire, took out a patent for a 'sofa or machine for the ease of invalids and others'⁴⁶. Half of the mattress was moved by means of a worm-gear into an upright or reclining position while the other half folded into an inverted 'V' on which the invalid's legs could rest.

The developments in adjustable reclining furniture were the main factor behind the production of reclining easy chairs in the second decade of the nineteenth century. William Pocock, already mentioned as the inventor of the 'boethema' mattress, played an important part in the transfer of reclining mechanisms from beds and sofas to chairs. He was apprenticed as a cabinet-maker in Buckinghamshire in 1766⁴⁷ but did not immediately work

at that craft. He established a building business in Essex about 1786 but soon abandoned the venture and moved to London where he set up as a patent furniture manufacturer, an occupation which allowed scope for his craft, business and mechanical interests⁴⁸. His 'boethma' mattress was adapted to ordinary beds, sofas and chair beds, all of which he was producing by 1801⁴⁹. Pocock made both invalid furniture and ordinary domestic furniture based on his reclining invalid furniture. Plate 10 of the firm's trade card of 1814 states that 'Merlin's Reclining and Gouty Chairs' were reclining invalid chairs on wheels but the caption below the identical patent reclining easy chair without wheels illustrated in Plate 8 of the same trade card makes no mention of invalids⁵⁰. Pocock stressed the elegant modern appearance of the chair and it would not have been out of place in certain day rooms, particularly a library or study. Similarly, the chair patented by Robert Daws in 1827⁵¹ was described as so designed that when it was not used as a reclining seat, 'the back can be fixed upright; and the front projection slid in, so as to produce the appearance of a common easy chair'⁵².

Despite the reference to 'patent' in Pocock's advertisements, no patent was taken out for his or any other reclining chair until the late 1820s. Pocock, with two patents, of 1800 and 1805 respectively, behind him, was no stranger to the methods and means of obtaining patents. The reason that he and others did not take out patents in the years before 1827 was almost certainly because they considered there was no new invention to be protected. When Robert Daws, upholsterer of Margaret Street, Cavendish Square, and Thomas Miniken, cabinet-maker of Berwick Street, St. James's, patented their reclining chairs in 1827 and 1828 respectively,⁵³ however, other manufacturers who, like Pocock, had made such items without claiming originality, also began to take out patents. That taken out by John Minter,

upholsterer, cabinet-maker and chair manufacturer of Princes Street, Soho, in 1830 was unsuccessfully challenged in law in 1834: it was clearly stated that the novelty of such chairs lay not in their construction or in the adjusting mechanisms used, neither of which were new, but in the combination of those two factors in one chair⁵⁴.

Six of the eight patents concerning reclining or easy chairs taken out in the years 1827-50 came from furniture-makers involved with their production⁵⁵. The other two came from surgeons and witness the continued interest of members of the medical profession in comfort⁵⁶. The patents all used mechanisms to project the chair into various positions and the difference between the patents lay in the type of mechanism used and the way in which it was operated. The novelty of Thomas Miniken's invention, for instance, was claimed to be the crank and lever movement by which the chair back was moved after pressure was applied on the leg or foot rest, or jambier as it was sometimes called⁵⁷. On the other hand, Minter's reclining chair, patented in 1830 and improved in 1845, with its 'self-adjusting leverage of the back and seat', worked by means of quadrants operated by the application of pressure upon the rests⁵⁸.

Non furniture-makers, particularly camp-equipage-makers and brass-founders were active in patenting improvements for bedsteads. Furniture-makers, however, played some part in developing invalid bedsteads and, in the years before 1812, the most important single development in the design of portable and vermin-free bedsteads came from a furniture-maker. In 1785, Thomas Waldron of the Strand patented his method of constructing a bedstead with sliding metal fitments attached to the bed rails and posts⁵⁹. This eliminated the need to use screws and nuts to join the connecting parts which were commonly accepted as the usual hiding place of vermin⁶⁰. The timing of Waldron's patent suggests that it developed not only out of a heightened concern for hygiene apparent in the

second half of the eighteenth century but also out of the demand for light and portable furniture for military campaigns in North America in the years c. 1775-1783. His invention was in use throughout the years 1793-1815 when Britain was at war with France⁶¹ but, in 1812, the first of a series of inventions concerning the application of metal tubing to entire bedsteads was patented. These came not from furniture-makers, who appear to have been content to use Waldron's patent, but from camp-equipage-makers.

The advertising used by furniture-making firms to promote patent bedsteads emphasised that they were especially suitable for army and naval officers and those living in the British colonies as well as for general domestic use⁶². Morgan and Sanders and other furniture firms sold army and navy equipage as well as the specialist camp-equipage-makers. Although furniture-making and camp-equipage-making were closely connected by the fact that the supply of goods for travellers included furniture and in terms of certain personnel⁶³, it was, nevertheless, only camp-equipage-makers who grasped the potential application of improvements in the construction of hollow metal-tubing to bedsteads made entirely in metal. Furniture-makers were probably reluctant to venture beyond metal fittings to bedsteads made entirely of metal because that would have involved abandoning wood, the traditional material in which they worked. Camp-equipage-makers patented all the metal bedsteads registered in the years 1812-26⁶⁴ but after that date new developments came mainly from Birmingham, the importance of which, as the centre of the metal bedstead-making industry, has already been discussed⁶⁵.

A wider range of compact, portable and multi-purpose furniture, generally termed 'patent' furniture, was also produced although patents were never issued for most of the items⁶⁵. In the years between 1790 and 1830

in particular, the term 'patent' was loosely applied to furniture that displayed novelty or mechanical ingenuity in one form or another. Bedsteads, extending dining-tables and reclining chairs were the most popular items of 'patent' furniture but other items included folding-tables and chairs, chair and sofa beds, library-steps which turned into tables or chairs, and revolving bookcases. The main manufacturers were furniture-making firms which specialised in such goods and they stressed the usefulness of such furniture to travellers. The portability and versatility of the furniture appealed to the military and undoubtedly accounted for some of its popularity during and immediately after the Napoleonic War.

The origins of such furniture, however, pre-date the French Wars. The first piece of multi-purpose furniture to be patented was that submitted by Isaac de la Chaumette, an engineer, as early as 1721⁶⁶. It was for a picture which served as a tester to a couch bed by night and as an ornament and work of art by day. It was not until the 1770s that there was any general interest in patenting multi-purpose and compact furniture, although such pieces were produced throughout the eighteenth century. Thomas Gale, cabinet-maker and upholsterer of the Strand, patented his bedstead, designed to fold away into either a wardrobe or a bookcase, in 1772⁶⁷ and two years later, Robert Campbell, cabinet-maker and upholsterer to the Prince of Wales, whose premises were in St. Giles in the Fields, patented his library-steps which opened out of one of a variety of types of table, chair or stool⁶⁸.

Much of the furniture designed for use by military and civilian travellers was space saving and compact in design but the need to economise on space has been offered as the main reason behind the production not only of goods suitable for travelling but of the whole wide range of 'patent' furniture for use in domestic interiors. Edward Joy argued that the function of domestic 'patent' furniture was space saving and that it developed

as a result of the rapid increase in population, which more than doubled in the years between 1751 and 1821 and doubled again between 1821 and 1851, and led to overcrowding in British towns and cities⁶⁹. The extent to which the pressure of population affected the design of furniture in London in the 1770s or even in the early years of the nineteenth century has, however, to be questioned. Joy pointed out that 'congested conditions were the lot of even many of the comfortably-off classes'⁷⁰ but it can hardly be said that the living conditions of the middle and upper classes who bought from the West End firms which manufactured multi-purpose, compact and 'patent' furniture were congested. Moreover, compact and multi-purpose furniture went out of fashion for a period after the 1820s while congested and overcrowded conditions continued to prevail in British cities.

Campbell's library-steps, which were claimed to have been first produced for George III and were later manufactured by the better class London shops, were not designed as a result of over-crowding. This well-designed chair or table which could neatly and instantly be transformed into a pair of steps had great appeal to those who admired ingenuity. The roots of 'patent' furniture design are better perceived in the efforts of furniture-makers and others to meet the needs of the traveller and campaigner, in the delight in novelty and invention in general, apparent in many diverse fields of activity from the 1760s onwards, and in an increasing middle class market rather than as a result of overcrowded accommodation. Middle-class homes, the number of which was rapidly increasing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, were, on the whole, smaller than those of the upper classes, but they were by no means overcrowded. Those who lived in them wanted goods similar to those bought by the upper classes. This market was an important factor in the development of 'patent' multi-purpose furniture such as the revolving bookcase, patented by Benjamin Crosby in 1808, which

was suitable for the nouveaux riches who could afford books but not a separate library in which to house them⁷¹. Similarly, the extending dining-table was designed for those who only occasionally wished to entertain large numbers of people. Extending dining-tables were not multi-purpose in the sense that rooms were used for other purposes such as a drawing room, but were a sensible solution to the custom of a specialised dining-room that had developed in the second half of the eighteenth century⁷². Flexibility rather than compactness as such was what manufacturers aimed at in the new dining-tables.

The strong emphasis placed on overcrowding and congestion as a factor in the development of multi-purpose domestic furniture in the years up to 1820 is misleading because it takes too seriously the claim made by the inventors and manufacturers of such items, who always stressed every conceivable use to which a piece might be put. When situated in a well-to-do domestic interior, the additional uses to which convertible pieces could theoretically be put were hardly ever utilised. With the exception of vermin-free bedsteads and extending dining-tables, both of which filled obvious functional needs, the main appeal of much 'patent' furniture produced in the years up to 1830 lay in its novelty or mechanical ingenuity; the patent specification for Crosby's revolving bookcase, for instance, referred to it as a 'machine for books'⁷³. By 1830, however, the main manufacturers of such furniture were out of business. After that date, metal bedsteads began to replace the 'patent' portable ones thereby removing one of the two most popular items while extending dining-tables were absorbed into the standard repertoire of most cabinet-making shops. The fashion, some have even referred to it as a craze, for 'patent' furniture, had largely burned itself out by 1830⁷⁴.

Certain furniture-makers who registered patents attempted to put

them into production. Others did not. John Elwick, upholsterer of Wakefield, Yorkshire, and George Remington, cabinet-maker of Queens Square, Bloomsbury, for instance, sold their inventions to Morgan and Sanders, one of the leading manufacturers of 'patent' furniture. Elwick's invention of 1800 for furniture which packed flat proved invaluable to a firm concerned with furniture for travellers⁷⁵ and Remington's globe table of 1807 was adapted by them to form a combined globe-table and writing-desk, known as 'Pitts Cabinet Globe Writing Table'⁷⁶. Morgan and Sanders' patent 'metamorphic library chair', which turned into library-steps, was adapted from the patent registered by Robert Campbell in 1774⁷⁷. The patent expired in 1788 but it does not appear to have been taken up by other furniture-makers until after Campbell ceased trading in the last few years of the eighteenth century. Morgan and Saunders' version, which was extremely popular, was featured in Ackermann's Repository of Arts in July 1811⁷⁸. The same firm also took over the manufacture of the circular bookcase patented by the bookseller Benjamin Crosby in 1808⁷⁹.

Non furniture-makers had a greater incentive to sell the rights to their inventions since they had no suitable workshops and it was usually well-known and established firms which bought them. It has already been noted that Seddon took over the patent of the carpenter Day Gunby⁸⁰. Johnstone and Jeanes produced furniture patented by a gentleman, Thomas Lane Coulson of Assington Hall, Assington, Suffolk, who in 1846 invented new methods of constructing chairs so as to give better support to the back of the persons using them⁸¹. The firm supplied a rosewood 'patent Coulson's Easy Chair', with a carved and gilt frame and chintz upholstery, for the use of Queen Victoria in 1848⁸². Others, such as Anthony George Eckhardt,

gentlemen, turned manufacturer in order to produce their own invention⁸³.

Similarly, the Francis Kane who manufactured patent chairs in 1850 was almost certainly the same Francis Kane who, in earlier years, had been described as a mechanic⁸⁴.

Despite the lack of evidence concerning the careers of many furniture-makers who took out patents, many, indeed probably most, of them ran their own firms. Joy refers to the furniture-makers who took out patents as craftsmen but there is no evidence that any of the patentees who were furniture-makers worked at the bench at the time they took out their patents. Some furniture-makers, such as Richard Gillow, had been trained in a craft and were therefore well versed in furniture-making from the craft as well as the managerial side but nevertheless they were entrepreneurs whose main motive in patenting new types of goods or methods of manufacture was to increase the profits of their firm. Those who organised the manufacture of their own inventions included Robert Campbell, whose firm made a speciality of the library steps he patented in 1774⁸⁵. The firms of Gillow, and Jupe, Johnstone and Company both produced dining-tables of the type patented by partners of those firms in 1800 and 1835 respectively⁸⁶. Similarly, Robert Daws, John Minter and Joseph Brown all ran or were partners in firms which produced the easy chairs for which they themselves had each obtained patents (Appendix II, Table 2).

William Pocock, who ran a 'patent' furniture manufactory, does not appear to have worked to any patents other than his own although he manufactured a variety of items for which no official patents were registered⁸⁷. His two main rivals in the manufacture of 'patent' furniture were Butler and Morgan and Sanders. Together these three firms dominated the market and yet the two latter firms were not responsible for a single official patent. They obtained rights to the inventions of

others, irrespective of whether or not they originated from furniture-makers, and also worked to specifications, the protection for which had expired. An example of the latter was the patent taken out by furniture-maker Thomas Waldron in 1785 for vermin-free bedsteads. The inventor himself worked the patent for at least almost a decade before it was taken up by Butler and Morgan and Sanders after 1799, the year in which the patent rights expired⁸⁸. It is possible, however, that before that date Waldron may have granted a licence to manufacture to Thomas Butler, the former attorney's clerk turned 'patent' furniture manufacturer of 14 Catherine Street, for whom Waldron's son-in-law, James Staines, worked from 1792. That Waldron at some stage sold the exclusive rights to his invention is supported by the display of the original patent in the shop of Butler's successor, Thomas Oxenham, albeit in 1800 after the expiry date of the patent⁸⁹. If Butler had not held rights to the patent before 1799, however, it seems unlikely that he would have had the original document in his possession. Oxenham's claim that he had purchased Butler's sole rights to the invention when he took over the business in 1800 must, however, be discounted as a fabrication designed to encourage the public to associate his product with that of his predecessor. In 1801, Morgan and Sanders, headed by former employees of Butler, offered bedsteads on the same lines as that produced first by Waldron and then by Butler⁹⁰ and, in 1810, other former employees, Pryer, Staines and Mackenzie, also offered for sale a range of goods similar to that produced earlier by Butler, which probably included the popular patent bedsteads⁹¹.

Besides the patent bedsteads, Butler also advertised patent tables based 'upon an entire new construction' in January 1800 and, in 1803, claimed to be in possession of the patent for such a table⁹². The 'Imperial' dining-table, which not only extended but also packed flat, was manufactured

by both Butler and Morgan and Sanders in the early years of the nineteenth century but Thomas Morgan claimed it as his own invention made, presumably, when he worked for Butler⁹³. Neither Morgan nor Butler, however, officially registered a patent dealing with either extending tables or folding furniture. Others did. Within four months of Butler advertising his new 'patent' tables in January 1800, John Marshall and Richard Gillow both registered their extending dining-tables⁹⁴. John Elwick followed in July 1800 with his patent for folding furniture⁹⁵. Coming so soon after the publicity from Butler, it would appear that these three patents were probably registered in an attempt by Marshall, Gillow and Elwick to protect their 'inventions' which they had not hitherto felt it was necessary to formally patent.

After the decline of the specialist 'patent' furniture-makers in the 1820s and 30s, patents concerning furniture continued to be taken out in increasing numbers. Furniture-makers, however, remained content to patent small-scale improvements which mainly related to items in everyday production. Patents registered by non furniture-makers also continued to be recognised and used in the trade, as was the case when Johnson and Jeanes manufactured chairs according to Coulson's patent of 1846⁹⁶. Furniture-makers were not involved in the main innovations in furniture production in the 1830s and 40s - the development of carving machines and the introduction of metal bedsteads. The former were used by specialist 'patent' carving firms outside the furniture trade proper⁹⁷ while metal bedsteads were produced by Birmingham metal manufacturers who dominated the patent lists as far as metal bedsteads were concerned. Some of the metal bedstead manufacturers opened shops in London in the mid-nineteenth century. There, ironically, they sold not only metal bedsteads but a whole range of metal 'patent' furniture said to be suitable for the traveller, just as was that of the earlier 'patent' furniture-makers⁹⁸.

Footnotes

- 1 Bennet Woodcroft, Patents of Inventions 1617-1853 Subject Matter Index, 1854, Furniture and Cabinet-Ware and Upholstery
- 2 Phyllis Deane, The First Industrial Revolution, 1969, -. 128
- 3 ibid., p. 119; Pierre Verlet, French Royal Furniture, 1963, pp. 17-18; Hans Huth, Roentgen Furniture, 1974, pp. 17-18; Georg Himmelhaber, Biedermeier Furniture, translated and edited by Simon Jervis, 1974, pp. 39-42 and 88-90; and Rosemarie Stratmann, 'Design and Mechanisms In The Furniture of Jean-François Oeben', Furniture History, vol IX, 1973, pp. 110-113
- 4 Edward T. Joy, English Furniture 1800-1851, 1977, p. 201 and George Rudé, Hanoverian London 1714-1808, 1971, pp. 32-3
- 5 Joy, op. cit., pp. 199-216
- 6 ibid., p. 199
- 7 Woodcroft, Patents, Furniture and Cabinet-Ware and Upholstery
- 8 Thomas Sheraton, The Cabinet Dictionary, 1803, pp. 138-9
- 9 nos. 3406, 3548*, 3698*, 3976*, 4008, 4481*, 5562, 5584*, 6478*, 6721, 7835, 8240*, 8485, 8745, 8788*, 8823, 9182, 9203, 9870, 12459, 12695, 13213, 13383*, 13823*.
* denotes brass founders.
- 10 J.C. Loudon, An Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture and Furniture, rev. ed., 1839, p. 325
- 11 no. 2671
- 12 no. 13213. see also no. 9283 no. 36
- 13 Woodcroft, Patents, Upholstery II. Making Window Curtains and Blinds
- 14 nos. 1142 and 1162
- 15 no. 1164
- 16 no. 2712
- 17 no. 995
- 18 no. 2657
- 19 no. 2396
- 20 nos. 2898 and 3090 resp.
- 21 no. 3827
- 22 no. 1579
- 23 no. 10332

- 24 no. 11194
- 25 no. 2007
- 26 nos. 3217 + 5506 resp.
- 27 no. 12821
- 28 The London Cabinet Makers' Book of Prices For the Most Improved Extensible Dining Tables, 1815
- 29 Clifford Musgrave, Regency Furniture 1800-1830, 1961, p. 127
- 30 no. 2895 + PRO FO 185/50, Spain 1814 (Pocock advertisement)
- 31 'Reminiscences' by William Pocock (b. 1813), grandson of Pocock the furniture-maker. Given to Edward Joy by Mrs. Molly Powell. Archive of the late Edward Joy.
- 32 no. 1579
- 33 see p. 240
- 34 nos. 2542, 6188, 8330 + 10361
- 35 nos. 11568 + 6223 resp.
- 36 no. 9283
- 37 no. 2248
- 38 G. Bernard Hughes, 'Day Gunby's Patent Furniture', Country Life, 21 Feb 1957, pp. 330-1
- 39 no. 860
- 40 no. 2005
- 41 no. 14349
- 42 Joy, English Furniture 1800-1851, p. 208
- 43 see M. Dorothy George, London Life in the Eighteenth Century, 1965, pp. 61-72, George Rudé, Hanoverian London, pp. 32-3
- 44 no. 3387
- 45 no. 3597
- 46 no. 3744
- 47 PRO IR 1/24
- 48 Edward T. Joy, 'Pocock's - the ingenious inventors', Connoisseur, Feb 1970, pp. 88-92

- 49 Trade card. BM. Banks Collection D2.623
- 50 PRO FD 185/50, Spain 1814 (Pocock advertisement)
- 51 no. 5490
- 52 Loudon, Encyclopaedia, pp. 1057-8, illus.fig. 1913. see also advertisement
in The Weekly Free Press, vol. iv, 11 Oct 1828
- 53 nos. 5490 + 5700 resp.
- 54 no. 6034. see Joy, English Furniture 1800-1851, p. 303, n. 12
- 55 nos. 5490, 5700, 6034, 6380, 7799, 10918
- 56 nos. 7285 + 10545
- 57 no. 5700
- 58 no. 6034
- 59 no. 3650
- 60 see L.O.J. Boynton, "The Bed-Bug And The 'Age of Elegance'", Furniture History, vol. 1, 1965, pp. 15-31
- 61 PRO FD 185/50, Spain 1814 (Pocock advertisement)
- 62 Joy, English Furniture 1800-1851, pp. 205-6 and Brian Austen, 'Morgan and Sanders And The Patent Furniture Makers Of Catherine Street', Connoisseur, Nov 1974, pp. 185-190
- 63 see pp. 211 for Samuel Pratt Senior and Junior
and 230
- 64 nos. 3560, 5162, 5403 and 5410
- 65 Joy, English Furniture 1800-1851, p. 199
- 66 no. 434
- 67 no. 1002
- 68 no. 1086
- 69 Joy, English Furniture 1800-1851, p. 200
- 70 ibid., p. 200
- 71 no. 3153
- 72 see p. 24
- 73 no. 3153
- 74 G. Bernard Hughes, 'Furniture For The Regency Traveller', Country Life,
2 Mar 1967, p. 453, Austen, 'Morgan + Sanders', p. 184 and Joy,
English Furniture 1800-1851, p. 210

- 75 no. 2420. Hughes, op. cit., p. 452 and Austen, op. cit. p. 186
- 76 no. 3090. Hughes, op. cit., p. 453 and Austen, op. cit. p. 187
- 77 no. 1086
- 78 Austen, 'Morgan + Sanders', pp. 186-7
- 79 no. 3153, Austen, op. cit. p. 187
- 80 see p. 242
- 81 no. 11264
- 82 PRO LC 11/134
- 83 Eckhardt's address was given as Chelsea (in patent no. 2208), the location of Eckhardt and Co.'s 'Royal Patent Manufactory'.
- 84 nos. 9283 + 13213
- 85 LFM, p. 33
- 86 nos. 2396 + 788 resp.
- 87 Joy, 'Pococks', pp. 88-92
- 88 Austen, 'Morgan + Sanders', pp. 180-1
- 89 ibid., p. 186
- 90 ibid., p. 186
- 91 ibid., p. 182
- 92 ibid., p. 186
- 93 ibid., p. 186
- 94 nos. 2393 + 2396 resp.
- 95 no. 2420
- 96 see note 82
- 97 see p. 213
- 98 V + A. Furniture and Woodwork. Archive. Peyton (trade pamphlet)

CHAPTER 11

THE LONDON COMPANIES

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The craft guilds or Livery Companies of the City of London were open to employers and journeymen alike. Many London furniture-makers belonged to guilds, particularly the Joiners' and Upholders' Companies and, in the early years of the eighteenth century at least, looked to the companies to protect their craft or 'mystery'. Despite valiant attempts to reverse the decline of guild power, the companies had difficulty in enforcing some of the basic regulations concerning training and production within furniture-making.

By the end of the eighteenth century, many journeymen furniture-makers looked to trade societies rather than the guilds to protect their interests. The companies were dominated by the interests of the larger master craftsmen-entrepreneurs and some of the leading furniture-makers found little difficulty in remaining within the companies. Others, including William Hallett, Thomas Chippendale and John Cobb, however, all of whom were trained outside London, were never brought within company control.

The origins of the guild system are obscure but the system was established from about the twelfth century and affected the trade and industry of Western Europe to the end of the eighteenth century¹. The guilds were collective organisations of craftsmen but, from the thirteenth century, a few London guilds included merchants. Those master craftsmen who were also entrepreneurs played a large part in the craft guilds and helped to develop a corporate structure by which they attempted to establish a monopoly over their trade. By the fifteenth century, the economic functions of these craft fraternities clearly outweighed any social or religious customs with which they were also associated². In the fifteenth century, it became common practice to grant charters to London

craft guilds which formally acknowledged their rights and privileges.

The regulation of apprenticeships, prices and wages, and the maintenance of high standards of production, as well as a monopoly over a particular craft or 'mystery' and all those practising it, were the main features of guild control. Welfare benefits were also offered whereby the poor, aged, infirm and injured could look to the company for assistance³.

Certain companies represented the woodworking and furniture trades from the fifteenth century, if not earlier. The Carpenters' Company was incorporated in 1477⁴ while its offshoot, the Joiners' Company, was established as a separate entity in the reign of Elizabeth I⁵. The turners enjoyed some form of guild organisation from the early fourteenth century and received their charter in 1604⁶. The Upholders, recognised as a separate 'mystery' in 1360, were granted a coat of arms in 1465⁷ but had to wait until 1626 for their charter⁸. By the time this latter charter was granted, however, the control of the guilds over the trades of London had already begun to decline. The monopolies of the guilds, never absolute, had been jealously guarded throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries but, by the early seventeenth century, had been seriously weakened by the commercial and physical expansion of London and the development of capitalist production⁹.

In 1700, furniture-making remained a handicraft system of production, mostly organised in small workshops, but even so it proved difficult for the companies to control furniture-making in the following century. Not only had the powers of the guilds in general so declined that they no longer represented only their own particular craft but new skills, such as cabinet-making, had been allowed to develop without incorporation into a company which could represent them exclusively¹⁰. Men working at such crafts were not obliged to join any particular company but could choose whichever one they felt best suited them. Moreover, it was the larger craftsmen-

entrepreneurs, who dominated the guilds, to whom the guild system seemed outmoded. By contrast, the journeymen and small independent masters, who felt their position to be threatened, were the ones who looked back to the supposedly halcyon days of Tudor corporatism and urged the companies to solidify their evaporating control. The last vestiges of control over training, searches, the employment of freemen (i.e. men free of the company) and even poor relief fell away in the first half of the eighteenth century and, despite a concerted effort to rejuvenate the system in the years between 1750 and 1780¹¹, from the last quarter of the eighteenth century the guilds were unable to exercise much control over furniture-making. In the early nineteenth century they were, by and large, the businessmen's clubs with charitable traditions and ancient rituals that we know today¹².

The proportion of furniture-makers who belonged to City Companies in the eighteenth century is not known but the Upholders' and Joiners' Companies contained the largest numbers of furniture-makers. Some furniture-makers chose to be free of other companies, particularly those in which they could obtain their freedom by right of patrimony, that is by virtue of their father's membership. They belonged to a variety of companies including the Goldsmiths, Drapers and Merchant Taylors, members of the élite 'Great 12' mercantile companies which hampered the attempts of the lesser companies to re-establish traditional guild controls, as well as the Longbow-stringers, Weavers, Leathersellers and others¹³. Many chose to ignore the London companies, however, despite the efforts of those companies to force them to take up membership.

The occupations of members of the Joiners' Company were not normally listed in the Company records but where information does exist it reveals that woodworking furniture-makers, especially cabinet-makers and carvers, were reasonably well represented at a rank and file level in the company. The apprenticeship bindings for June 1767 - May 1769 show that

23% of masters taking apprentices in those years were cabinet-makers, carvers or carver and gilders¹⁴. A smaller, but by no means insignificant, percentage was involved at the higher level of Livery membership: in 1750, approximately 18% of the Livery of the Joiners' Company were furniture-makers¹⁵. Furthermore, several furniture-makers, including the well-known entrepreneurs Giles Grendey and George Seddon, rose in the company hierarchy and became Master of the Company¹⁶. This was also the case in the Upholders' Company, where in 1750 just under 50% of the Livery were upholsterers¹⁷.

The basic organisation of both the Joiners' and the Upholders' Companies was similar. At the bottom were the freemen who were allowed entry only after the satisfactory completion of an apprenticeship and a prescribed time, usually two years, spent working as a journeyman at the craft. They could also enter by right of patrimony or by purchase, which was known as redemption. Between the freemen and the company officials was the Livery, a body of substantial master craftsmen which developed in the fifteenth century, entry into which involved the payment of an extra fee and the purchase of special clothing, hence the name Livery¹⁸. Membership of the Livery brought considerable social distinction and many useful business contacts in the eighteenth century but little real power¹⁹. That lay with the Court of Assistants, elected from Liverymen, which held the right of nomination of Liverymen and senior officials and which drew up company regulations concerning production, apprentices, freedoms and other areas of concern to the guild.

The Liveries of both companies were dominated by well-to-do masters. The fee for the Livery in the Upholders' Company was about five guineas in the eighteenth century²¹ and, although the company charter granted an unlimited livery, the numbers were kept fairly small at about 100 to 120 throughout the century²². Those who were upholsterers mixed with other master craftsmen and entrepreneurs such as undertakers, auctioneers, feather

dealers and bed-joiners who must have proved useful business contacts²³.

Other Livery members were also useful in that they were well off and might patronise an upholsterer in their own company or at least recommend his services to clients and friends. In the Joiners' Company, where the Livery was much larger, standing at over 400 in 1750, and furniture-makers were in a minority, there was a similar opportunity to extend business contacts. In 1750, for instance, the Livery included eight timber merchants, eight undertakers, seven coffin-makers, two clock-case-makers and a glass-grinder, all of whom might have proved useful contacts for a furniture manufacturer²⁴.

The Livery records of both companies reveal many well-known furniture-makers. John Belchier, Henry Buck, Giles Grendey, Daniel Bell, Edward Newman, William Linnell, John Linnell, Thomas Whittle, Henry Williams, Edmund Gilding, Francis Gilding, Thomas Vardy and George Seddon were all Liverymen in the Joiners' Company²⁵. Entrepreneurs notable at Livery and higher levels in the Upholders' Company include Humphrey Skelton, John Howard, George Friend, Paul Saunders, Thomas Shackleton and William Rawlins²⁶. The latter, one of the wealthiest men in his trade, rose through the company to be elected as Sheriff of the City of London in 1801 and was knighted for his services to the City and its companies²⁷. The Seddon family boasted two Masters: George Seddon in the Joiners' Company²⁸ and his son-in-law Thomas Shackleton in the Upholders' Company²⁹.

Such men were entrepreneurs who owned substantial furniture-making firms. George Seddon, who presided over the largest comprehensive firm in the capital, owed no more allegiance to one craft than to another and, in terms of craft considerations, it mattered little to him to which company he belonged. It was with such entrepreneurs that the future of the companies lay and, in the second half of the eighteenth century, working craftsmen began to look elsewhere for protection³⁰.

In 1700, furniture-makers - large employers, small masters and

journeymen alike - expected the Upholders' Company and the Joiners' Company to protect the 'soft' and 'hard' sides of furniture-making respectively, since in the last eleven years of the seventeenth century both companies had fought on issues which affected their crafts or 'mysteries'. A dispute between cane chair-makers and upholsterers in 1689, for instance, saw both sides using their respective companies to fight their case. The Upholders' Company petitioned Parliament to prohibit the manufacture of cane chairs by adding a clause to a Parliamentary Bill to encourage woollen manufacture³¹. The petition claimed that before cane chairs were popular sixty thousand Turkey-work chairs and about two hundred and fifty thousand with other coverings were produced each year and that the production of cane chairs had led to about fifty thousand people being put out of work in the upholstery and woollen trades. The cane chair-makers wanted these arguments counter-acted and those members of the Joiners' Company whose livelihoods were dependent on the manufacture of such furniture requested that action be taken on their behalf³².

The Joiners' Company also came into conflict with the Basket Makers' Company, which decided in 1698 that chair caners should come within their jurisdiction. Several cane chair-makers, including Messrs. Read, Loveland, Markham, and Lawrence, requested that the Joiners' Company make representations to the Lord Mayor against the Basket Makers³³. Soon afterwards, a pressure group of cabinet-makers forced the Joiners' Company to take a stand against the powerful East India Company over the question of imported lacquered and japanned cabinet ware. The company petitioned Parliament and presented a well-argued case showing that the British export trade as well as domestic trade was threatened and citing exact numbers of different types of goods which had been imported in the previous four years³⁴. By contrast, the japanners, who also fought for import controls on lacquered goods, and who, like the cabinet-makers were not incorporated, do not appear

to have used a company to present their case³⁵.

In the first quarter of the eighteenth century, however, with the exception of the rather unconvincing defence by the Upholders' Company in 1724 of the rights of undertakers against a Bill designed to improve public health³⁶, there is no evidence that either the Upholders' or Joiners' Companies actively protected their trades with petitions or pamphlets. This was partly because there were fewer important issues such as those outlined above on which members demanded action, but it was also because it was increasingly difficult for any company to speak on behalf of a craft as the guilds increasingly lost control of the exclusive representation of particular groups of craftsmen. Undertaking, for instance, was traditionally associated with the Upholders' Company and, as stated, that company made representations on behalf of the trade in 1724. As the eighteenth century progressed, however, it became more difficult for the company to claim that it best represented undertakers since a diminishing number of those working in the trade joined the company. A considerable number of undertakers were members of the Joiners' Company in the second half of the eighteenth century as undertaking moved away from its early associations with linens, draperies and upholstery and developed into a comprehensive service covering most aspects of funerals and mourning, including coffins, hearses and mourning furniture³⁷.

The London Livery Companies each operated a system of welfare benefits which, although providing no more than short-term relief, offered some security for both masters and men. Fear of illness and accident haunted even the most skilled furniture craftsmen and both the Joiners' and Upholders' Companies assisted members who met with difficult times. Payment was not automatic: members or their widows had to apply to the officers who considered each case. In the Joiners' Company, successful petitioners received poor relief doled out from the 'poor box'³⁸. Special payments,

usually small sums, were made in the case of accidents. In 1704, for instance, relief was paid to a member of the Joiners' Company who had been bitten by a dog and was unable to work and, in the following year, a sum of 5/- was given to 'a poor man who broke his leg'³⁹. Poor relief in the Upholders' Company was organised through a fund which produced £20 per annum⁴⁰. This was distributed to twenty different worthy individuals at £1 per head but such small sums could have provided only short-term assistance. Other monies were paid out above and beyond this but they were also on a one-off basis. William Humphreys, who served in all the offices of the Upholders' Company including Master, was 'by reason of losses and misfortunes in trade' reduced to poverty and forced to petition his company for assistance in 1732⁴¹. Even then, the amount given to one of its former leading members was only sufficient to bring some small measure of temporary relief. He was given two guineas and a promise of 6/- per week for a limited but unspecified period. Similarly, 10/- were paid to Humphrey Skelton, another leading member of the Upholders' Company, in 1736 when he was ill, and one guinea was paid to his landlady for looking after him⁴³. The assistance given to Humphreys and Skelton, however, was exceptional in that it was largely given in recognition of past services. Rank-and-file members were not treated so generously. Nevertheless, companies responded to sudden calamities such as when the home of a widow Stanley burnt down in 1745, on which occasion she received 14/- from the Joiners' Company⁴⁴. Assistance was also given when members found themselves in business difficulties. In 1711 and 1712, financial assistance was given to members of the Joiners' Company who found themselves in prison, presumably for debt⁴⁵. The Upholders' Company also ran a loan fund from which members could borrow in times of hardship and repay when their economic circumstances improved⁴⁶.

Money towards burial expenses was occasionally granted out of company funds but most often it was raised by special collections⁴⁷. It was

the aim of every respectable artisan to have a decent funeral and, in the early eighteenth century, many still looked to the company to provide against the ignominy of a pauper's grave⁴⁸. The aging or sick craftsman also looked to the company to provide some assistance to his future widow if she met with hard times, and small quarterly pensions were paid to distressed widows by both companies until the mid-nineteenth century at least⁴⁹.

Apart from pensions, however, the small charitable gifts, spasmodic though they were, disappear from the records of the two companies after the mid-eighteenth century. Special collections could still be taken from amongst the members but, for many craftsmen, these were probably less reliable than collections taken in the workshop. Furniture-makers were forced to look to benefit and trade societies for the elementary, if inadequate, protection hitherto offered by the companies. The decline and virtual collapse of the insurance aspects of the guilds has not been sufficiently emphasised by historians anxious to emphasise the postponement of the breakdown of guild control in the second half of the eighteenth century when guild membership, bereft of one of its former attractions, can hardly have appeared an enticing proposition to a craftsman furniture-maker.

That the guilds managed, albeit only temporarily, to re-establish some of their former control in the years c.1750-80 was a considerable achievement, even though it only postponed an inevitable decline. From the late seventeenth century onwards, both the Joiners' Company and the Upholders' Company made serious efforts to re-establish a monopoly of their crafts but they were more successful in some areas than others. The right of search, for instance, gradually fell into disuse in the course of the first half of the eighteenth century. In the early eighteenth century, the Upholders' Company searched houses and shops and fined those such as John Trott of Bishopsgate and Thomas Thirkland of Groom Alley, Southwark, who, in 1701,

made quilts with inferior and illegal materials known in the trade as 'trash'⁵⁰, but this custom was discontinued in the 1720s⁵¹. The Joiners' Company continued searches which extended into Wapping, Southwark and Westminster as well as the City itself, until the middle of the century⁵². These were not popular with masters, who resented interference with their right to use whatever materials and labour they liked. Fines were imposed at the time of a search which, if not paid, resulted in heavy financial penalties: in 1700, for instance, the Upholders' Company exacted penalties ranging from 2s.6d. to 15s.4d.⁵³. In 1709, during a search in Westminster, a riot broke out which involved the Joiners' Company in paying damages to the Crown⁵⁴, but searches continued. In April 1735, a chair seized by officials of the Joiners' Company at the shop of James Bull in St. Pauls Churchyard was found to be made of unsound and unsuitable materials. Company bye-laws stated that unless the master paid the fine, in Bull's case 1/-, and removed the parts of the chair found wanting and replaced them with good quality parts, then the chair would be sold⁵⁵. By mid-century, however, the Joiners' Company, like the Upholders' Company, had abandoned searches⁵⁶.

By that date, the two companies had also abandoned any attempts to control the apprenticeship system which was the core of craft exclusiveness. Most companies had regulations concerning the maximum number of apprentices, usually two, but from the mid-seventeenth century, masters who wanted to bind extra apprentices had challenged these. The Carpenters' Company recognised its failure to restrict the number of apprentices as early as 1655, when it allowed each member one extra apprentice, after discovering that masters were taking on youths and binding them through other companies and, by 1673, abandoned all attempts to restrict the number of apprentices⁵⁷.

The Joiners' Company, by contrast, continued to attempt to control the number of apprentices and, in 1675-6, fined several people for taking extra apprentices⁵⁶. This must have caused dissatisfaction because

thereafter members were allowed an extra apprentice if they could show a need and were prepared to pay for the privilege⁵⁹. This was the only concession made and both the Joiners' and Upholders' Companies, together with other city companies, clung to their formal rights of restriction⁶⁰. Members evaded these, however, by binding apprentices through members of other companies. In 1703, for instance, John Rogers of the Joiners' Company took an apprentice but arranged for him to learn the joiner's trade not from a fellow company member but from John Swithin, Citizen and Haberdasher⁶¹. Since Swithin had chosen to ignore the Joiners' Company and become free of another, this case was a de facto recognition of the company's inability to control not only apprenticeships but also freedoms. Similar irregularities occurred in the Upholders' Company. In 1716, for instance, William Scrimshire, who later became Master of the Company⁶², bound an apprentice 'in trust' for Arthur Caldecott, a member of the Merchant Taylors' Company⁶³. In view of the fact that there were no prosecutions concerning such matters, the companies appear to have turned a blind eye to apprenticeship irregularities and, by the middle of the eighteenth century, all restrictions on the number of apprenticeships were removed⁶⁴.

Apprenticeship was crucial to guild control but once the companies were no longer exclusive to a particular craft, the logic of serving an apprenticeship in and becoming free of a particular company was severely weakened. Not only did the Joiners' and Upholders' Companies make free by servitude craftsmen who trained with members ranging from tallow chandlers to haberdashers but they also took in a wide range of craftsmen and tradesmen by redemption and patrimony. The companies undertook no further attempts to regain control over apprenticeships, efforts in that direction being left to trade societies.

They did, however, mount a concentrated attack on the fundamental

question of freedoms. Several attempts were made to tighten up on freedoms in the early eighteenth century, not without some success. In 1706, the Upholders' Company prosecuted John Tatnell, who had been out of his time for several years and ran an upholstery warehouse but who had not taken up freedom of the Upholders' Company⁶⁵. Prosecution was made more difficult after 1725 when the Joiners' Company lost a legal action taken in accordance with a company bye-law of 1695, which stated that no person not free of that company should practise the joiner's trade under fine of £10. The company attempted to exclude a working joiner, George Wannel, from the freedom of the City because he had been apprenticed in and was free of the Merchant Taylors' Company⁶⁶. After this defeat, the Joiners' Company made no further attempts to enforce freedoms for at least a quarter of a century. The case of Thomas Clarke, an eminent upholsterer who, in 1746, was Master of the Drapers' Company, best illustrates the extent to which company control over freedoms had lapsed by the mid-eighteenth century⁶⁷.

At that time, however, several companies attempted to halt their steadily declining membership by enforcing freedoms⁶⁸. Between 1750 and 1758, a number of companies, including the Upholders', obtained acts of Common Council empowering them to enforce freedoms⁶⁹. The Companies were quick to press their case and newspaper advertisements, hand-bills and letters warned non-freemen of the new legislation. In the eleven companies which obtained acts, the number of freemen enrolled in the first five years after the act increased by 67% over registration before the act and, over the years 1760-1790, there was an overall 18% increase in freedoms by redemption⁷⁰. The Upholders' Company obtained its act in July 1750, which obliged all upholsterers in the City of London and seven miles radius to take up freedoms in that company under fine of £10⁷¹. Nineteen freedom admissions by redemption under the conditions of the act were recorded in the years 1750-59, rising to forty-eight in the years 1760-69. The figures dropped to thirty-three in

the following decade while between 1780 and 1789, there were only fifteen recorded⁷². Although the power of the act was waning in the 1780s, the Upholders' Company was able to force George Seddon II, of the firm of Seddon of Aldersgate Street, to take out company membership despite the leading role played by George Seddon Senior in the Joiners' Company⁷³. This case is particularly interesting because it illustrates not only the power of the Upholders' Company to enforce freedoms as late as the 1780s but also its ability to coerce a member of the largest furniture-making business in London.

George Seddon himself became a freeman of the Joiners' Company by redemption in 1754⁷⁴. He bound his own sons as well as his apprentices through that company and rose to the position of Master in 1795⁷⁵. His elder son, Thomas, was apprenticed in 1775 and probably trained as a cabinet-maker like his father⁷⁶. His younger son, George, appears to have been trained as an upholsterer. George Seddon II was not apprenticed until 1777⁷⁷, but the Upholders' Company began pressing him to take out his freedom as early as 1781, so determined was the company that he should not become free of the Joiners' Company⁷⁸. In April 1787, he was finally admitted to the Upholders' Company, capitulating only after the threat of legal action⁷⁹. But capitulate he did and once in membership, he used the Upholders' Company to bind some of the apprentices taken on in the family firm, including his nephew Thomas⁸⁰.

The acts concerning freedoms undoubtedly proved something of a tonic to the ailing guilds, but the disease lingered. Dr. J.R. Kellett has laid great stress on the postponement of the decline in guild powers by means of these acts⁸¹, but the technicality of guild membership meant little to entrepreneurs such as George Seddon II when the guilds had virtually no effect on the structure and organisation of furniture-making in London. Indeed, after George Seddon II entered the company by redemption, few others followed suit, there being only one such freedom in the 1790s⁸².

In order to make the enforcement of freedoms mean more than an increase in membership, the companies needed to enforce their authority in other areas. At the same time as they were enforcing freedoms, however, they gave way on the vital issue of employing 'foreigners', that is, craftsmen, usually of English origin, who were not freemen of the City of London. The readiness of the guilds to recognise the problems faced by employers who wished to hire such men was possibly a factor in persuading certain furniture-making entrepreneurs that company membership might not prove as restrictive as they feared. Under regulations detailed in an act of 1606, freemen were not allowed to employ 'foreigners'⁸³. The expansion of London and, in particular, the building and furnishing which took place after the Great Fire of 1666, however, led to such a great demand for skilled craftsmen that 'foreigners' were employed⁸⁴. In 1680, members of the Joiners' Company employing such craftsmen were merely reprimanded⁸⁵. In 1694-5, members were ordered not to employ 'foreign' carvers at St. Paul's Cathedral⁸⁶ but the practice continued because the demand for skilled labour remained. The City Corporation intervened in the situation and, in 1712, published an act to enforce that of 1606 under threat of prosecution in its courts⁸⁷. This ban on non-freemen was lifted in 1750, however, after pressure from employers who wanted to be able to employ non-freemen when freemen made 'unreasonable' demands⁸⁸.

A system of controlled licensing of 'foreigners' was introduced and cabinet-makers and chair-makers were prominent amongst those who took advantage of the new arrangements. An employer could obtain as many licences as he liked but had to have, or have had within the last twelve months, an apprentice living in his household⁸⁹. Licences were granted for short periods only, usually six weeks or three months, and had to be obtained before a craftsman could obtain work. This, together with the licence fee of 2s. 6d. per licence and the power of the Lord Mayor and

Aldermen to revoke them, may have encouraged some employers to avoid the system⁹⁰. How effective it was is not known but many furniture-makers took out licences rather than risk fines or legal action.

Francis Say, a leading entrepreneur of the mid-eighteenth century whose firm probably included both cabinet-making and upholstery as well as other crafts, registered large numbers of non-freemen. Although he was a member of the Upholders' Company and was usually referred to as an upholsterer⁹¹, his occupation was given as cabinet-maker when he obtained licences⁹². This suggests that he may have employed cabinet-makers but the workmen's occupations are not given in the records. He licensed four men in January 1750, followed by six in March. Sixteen were licensed in 1751 and, in the following year, the numbers were eight in June and sixteen in September. 1753 saw him take out fifteen licences and, in 1756, he took out seventeen on 13 January, renewing those and increasing the number to twenty only six weeks later⁹³. Another eminent furniture-maker, Francis Gilding, cabinet-maker and member of the Joiners' Company, registered eighteen 'foreigners' in 1758⁹⁴ but not all firms took on such large numbers. Indeed, not many employers could afford such large wage bills. Most registered non-freemen in ones, twos or threes, even up to six on occasions, but numbers above this were unusual.

The granting of licences was, in the words of J. R. Kellest, 'timely' and 'served as a method of keeping some legal tabs on crafts which would otherwise have been compelled to defy the Corporation'⁹⁵. Certain employers were brought under closer scrutiny by the system of dispensations but it was also a recognition of the bankruptcy of the guild system in the face of employers determined to have their own way. The companies recognised that members employed 'foreigners' and so formalised a situation which they were powerless to change. Dr. Kellest has argued that the measures dealing with freedoms and 'foreigners' made the guild system more

flexible and effective⁹⁶. It was more flexible in that it responded to the demands of the larger employers but how effective it was as far as furniture-making is concerned is open to doubt. Pressure from entrepreneurs led to the abandonment of all customary controls over furniture-making at the same time as leading manufacturers such as Hallett, Chippendale and Cobb remained outside guild membership.

By the early nineteenth century, it was customary for membership of any company to ensure that one could practise a craft or trade but even then many furniture-makers remained outside company membership. From 1835, freedoms were available without association with a company and redemption fees were reduced to £5, making freedoms no more than a 'civic licence'⁹⁷. In 1856, all laws against non-freemen were withdrawn and the companies officially recognised that they had moved from the 'necessary economic fraternities' they had once been to the wealthy proprietorial fellowships with old rituals and charitable traditions that they are today⁹⁸.

Footnotes

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- 2 Kahl, op. cit., p. 2
- 3 ibid., p. 2
- 4 Edward Basil Jupp, An Historical Account of the Worshipful Company of Carpenters of the City of London, 1887, p. 5
- 5 GL.JCR, MS 8037, Ordinance 1571
- 6 W.C. Hazlitt, The Livery Companies of the City of London, 1892, p. 653
- 7 ibid., p. 649
- 8 J. Bromley, The Armorial Bearings of the Guilds of London, 1960, p. 249
- 9 Kahl, Livery Companies, pp. 1-3
- 10 R. Campbell, London Tradesmen, 1747, pp. 332-5 and J.R. Kellest, 'The Breakdown of Gild and Corporation Control over the Handicraft and Retail Trades in London', Economic History Review, 2nd series, vol. X, 1957-8, p. 390 n.3
- 11 Kellest, op. cit., pp. 381-95
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- 13 Goldsmiths' Hall, Apprentice Book, 9, p. 254 (Goldsmiths); CLRO Licence Book, 1, 18 June 1754 and 11 Mar 1755 (Drapers), ibid., 27 Mar 1753 (Merchant Taylors); ibid., 15 July 1755 (Longbow-stringers); Natalie Rothstein, 'The Silk Industry in London 1702-1766', unpublished M.A. thesis, University of London 1961, p. 80 (Weavers); and Lindsay Boynton, 'William and Richard Gomm', The Burlington Magazine, June 1980, p.395 (Leathersellers)
- 14 GL. JCR, Bindings, vol. 7. 9% were cabinet-makers, 11% carvers, 3% carver and gilders and just less than 1% were upholsterers.
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- 22 ibid., pp. 43-4; Hazlitt, Livery Companies, p. 654 and GL. List of Liverymen, pp. 162-4
- 23 GL. List of Liverymen, pp. 162-4
- 24 ibid., pp. 95-103
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- 28 Phillips, Joiners', 'Livery'
- 29 see note 23
- 30 see following chapter
- 31 Proclamations, Declarations, Political Tracts etc., vol. 14, No. 100 'For the Encouragement of the consumption of the Woollen Manufacture of this Kingdom ...', ND. The date is 1689, not 1698 which is given as the conjectural date in the BL catalogue. see GL. JCR, MS 8046/3, 30 Dec 1689 and R.W. Symonds, 'English Cane Chairs. The Rise and Decline of an Industry between 1664 and 1747', Antique Collector, May 1937, p. 104
- 32 GL. JCR, MS 8046/3 30 Dec 1689
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- 34 Tracts on Trade, vol. 13, no. 2, 'The Case of the Joyners' Company against the Importation of Manufactured Cabinet-Work from the East-Indies' [1700/1]. see also GL. JCR, MS 8046/3, 7 Apr 1701
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- 38 Phillips, Joiners', p. 71
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- 40 Walton, 'Upholders', p. 47
- 41 ibid., p. 47. His bankruptcy is recorded in The Gentleman's Magazine, May 1732

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- 44 Phillips, Joiners', p. 59
- 45 ibid., p. 50
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- 47 ibid., p. 47. see also GL. UCR, MS 7141/2, 9 Oct 1729
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- 49 Phillips, Joiners', p. 75
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- 58 Phillips, Joiners', p. 41
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- 61 GL. JCR, Bindings, vol. 3, May 1703
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- 70 ibid., p. 393 and Kahl, Livery Companies, p. 29
- 71 Kellett, 'Breakdown', p. 390 took the date 6 June 1759 from the printed lists of the Acts of Common Council but the Upholders' Company did not obtain its Act until 30 July 1750, see Walton, 'Upholders' , p. 49
- 72 These figures were calculated from entries in the lists of Freedom Admissions drawn up by Walton, 'Upholders' , p. 51-79
- 73 GL. UCR, Freedoms, vol. 2, Apr 1787 (back of volume)
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- 75 Phillips, Joiners', 'Livery'
- 76 GL. JCR, Bindings, vol. 7, June 1775
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C H A P T E R 12

TRADE SOCIETIES

TRADE SOCIETIES

As guild controls weakened and entrepreneurs asserted themselves within the companies, journeymen looked to alternative institutions. By the early eighteenth century, groups of London journeymen had begun to form collective organisations outside the companies in order to protect and improve their wages and working conditions, to provide some security against sickness and unemployment and to protect their trade or 'mystery'¹. These organisations which, at first, often developed on a sporadic basis, were known as trade societies or clubs and usually represented only one group of craftsmen. The first known example of collective activity by journeymen furniture-makers outside a guild took place in 1731 when cabinet-makers and chair-makers demanded a 12-hour day². Combinations were not new but, about 1760, West End cabinet-makers formed a trade society which enjoyed a continuous existence until it joined a national union of cabinet-makers in 1877³.

There was some continuity between the trade societies and the guilds which, in certain ways, they resembled. The control of the guilds lingered on in the eighteenth century as trade societies developed in strength, but there has been much debate as to whether or not the one grew out of the other⁴. That there were some links between the two was argued as early as the 1830s. This position was re-iterated until 1894 when Sidney and Beatrice Webb, in The History of Trade Unionism, denied any direct link between the guilds and trade unions⁵. It is only recently that the interpretation of the Webbs, which became accepted as orthodoxy in the twentieth century, has been challenged. It has been challenged largely on the grounds that its emphasis on permanent organisation of wage-earners detracts from the importance of the locally, and often sporadically, organised early trade clubs⁶.

There is, however, a further consideration which suggests that the analysis offered by the Wechs needs qualifying. They argued that permanently organised trade societies developed only when the journeyman's prospects of becoming a master were infinitesimal, considering that as long as there was fluidity between the positions of employer and employee the antagonism of interests out of which trade unions developed was not present⁷. Permanently organised trade societies of furniture-makers, however, developed in the second half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century when many journeymen were still able to become masters⁸. They were well established by 1870 when George Elcock, himself a former president of the West End cabinet-makers' trade society, set up on his own after fourteen years as a journeyman⁹. Trade societies developed within furniture-making at a time when, although dominated by a few large entrepreneurs, the trade also housed a multitude of small firms and independent masters¹⁰.

Membership of guild and trade society was not mutually exclusive. Many of the West End craftsmen were guild trained in the eighteenth century¹¹ and it was in the West End trade that the first permanent trade society of furniture-makers was formed. Moreover, ninety years after the establishment of that society, a member of a London cabinet-makers' trade society also belonged to the Joiners' Company, through which he had been apprenticed in 1812¹². When the journeymen recognised that the guilds were unable or unwilling to defend the status of the skilled craftsman they established new institutions to do that job. Because they looked back to the supposedly halcyon days of Tudor corporatism, when apprenticeship was protected and the guilds controlled standards of training and workmanship, the societies adopted many of the guild traditions, particularly those concerning the trade or 'mystery'.

The continuity between the guilds and the early trade societies is illustrated by the symbols and emblems used by a cabinet-makers' trade

society. One of the earliest visual sources of trade society emblems is the membership card, dated 1801, of the United Society of Cabinet Makers of London¹³ (Plate 1), which may have been the same society as that founded by West End cabinet-makers about 1760. Although cabinet-makers were not incorporated, many belonged to the Joiners' Company¹⁴ and the card utilised motifs from the armorial bearings of the company¹⁵. The cabinet-makers did not simply reproduce the arms as did trade societies of joiners¹⁶ but used the symbols of the craft, the compass and the set square. Two red roses appear in the arms of the Joiners' Company but the elegant trade card designed by Thomas Sheraton has a naturalistic spray of rose blooms and foliage and it is difficult to know how far the latter aroused craft associations in the minds of the cabinet-makers. There the similarity between the emblems of the Joiners' Company and the trade society ends. The female figure of Justice and the clasped hands signifying solidarity were both common motifs in early trade society emblems¹⁷. The design also includes a tool box and inscription indicating that the society protected against loss of tools by fire. A cherub holds a book of furniture designs of the type worked to in the quality trade and for which the society negotiated the rates. The overall appearance of the card, which is capped by drapery window curtains and features a fashionable table, resembles the trade-cards and bill-heads issued by certain furniture-making firms¹⁸. The card not only emphasises the artistic gentility but also the traditions of the craft. It illustrates the society's belief in justice, solidarity and the protection of its members. It summarised visually not only the links between the guilds and the trade societies but also the aims of the journeymen furniture-makers who formed the first trade societies.

Trade societies developed in certain furniture-making crafts earlier than others. Within each craft, however, it was the most skilled workers who took the initiative and formed the first society. As stated



earlier, the earliest known example of London furniture-makers organising collectively occurred in 1731 when journeymen cabinet-makers and chair-makers demanded the twelve-hour day already worked by carvers and house-joiners²⁰.

The journeymen refused to work the extra hour demanded of them and the masters retaliated with a lock-out. 'Shop-joiners and carpenters' were hired to replace the men who then devised a scheme which they hoped would undercut their masters. A newspaper advertisement called upon the 'Gentry and Quality' who did not mind furniture-makers working at their homes to contact the journeymen at their headquarters, The Black Boy and The Apple-Tree public-houses in St. Martin's Lane, and assured them of work done in the cheapest and best manner²¹. This venture into independent production probably failed but it indicates that a considerable degree of organisation was developed during this lock-out, if it did not exist before.

The journeymen's organisation was only of a temporary nature, disintegrating after the dispute was over. It was not until about thirty years later that the first continuous association of furniture-makers in London was formed. The Cabinet Makers Society was established in the West End about 1760, probably either as a result of discontent which led to a strike in 1761 or emerging out of the strike which highlighted the need for a permanent organisation²². Prices, especially food prices, rose in the 1760s and continued to do so throughout the remaining years of the eighteenth century²³. Horace Walpole was sympathetic to the plight of those who sold their labour in such circumstances, commenting in 1762 that the

'journeymen carpenters, like the cabinet makers, have entered into an association not to work unless their wages are raised; and how can one complain? The poor fellows, whose all the labour is, see their masters advance their prices every day, and think it reasonable to touch their share'.²⁴

The strike of furniture-makers to which Walpole referred was that which began in September 1761 when the journeymen cabinet-makers and chair-

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makers of the metropolis went on strike after their demands for shorter hours and improved piece-rates had been refused²⁵. Frequent meetings were held at public-houses and money was raised to support the strike. The necessity of solidarity was emphasised and those men who worked normally were threatened with violence, including death or maiming. The strike must have seriously affected production because the masters obtained an order of council which declared the strike illegal²⁶. Magistrates were encouraged to prosecute all publicans who allowed strikers to meet on their premises and, by the end of the year, a number of successful prosecutions had been brought against 'rebellious' journeymen²⁷.

The backbone of the 1761 strike comprised men from 'several of the shops of principal cabinet and chair-makers in London and Westminster'²⁸ and it was the cabinet-makers from these leading firms who formed the first permanent trade society for furniture-makers. Despite joint action with the chair-makers in 1731 and again in 1761, craft considerations took priority and the cabinet-makers established a body representing only their own craft. The new society had many problems to contend with in the early years, including the refusal of certain masters to employ society men. Employers in the high class trade probably soon learned to accept society membership which, in later years, was certainly viewed by them as a guarantee of high standards of training and workmanship²⁹, but others made it a definite rule of employment that workers could not belong to a trade society³⁰.

Co-operation between masters and men over matters of common interest helped allay fears held by some masters about the journeymen's associations. One such instance was the joint activity undertaken in an attempt to stop the evasion of customs' duty on imported furniture. Between 1768 and 1773, a committee of journeymen cabinet-makers worked closely with some of those employers who were not themselves involved in the fraudulent dealings³¹. The

committee was probably established by the newly-formed trade society to deal with the problem of 'smuggling' foreign furniture into London. In 1768 certain entrepreneurs began to import large quantities of furniture, particularly chairs, in a 'knock-down' state, thereby avoiding duty and reducing freight charges³². The journeymen took prompt action. They appealed to both the Treasury Board and the Commissioners of Customs and *subsequently such items paid full duty*. In 1772, however, the furniture-makers John Cobb and James Cullen were involved in receiving and selling foreign furniture on which import duties had not been paid because they were brought in under an abuse of the right of diplomatic privilege³³. It was claimed that 'immense quantities of household furniture' entered the country in this way but, although the journeymen cabinet-makers complained to the Commissioners of Customs, they were unable to obtain satisfaction. It was not until a petition from both the journeymen and the masters was presented to the House of Commons that the abuses were curtailed³⁴. This joint action shows the preparedness of both sides to work together in the interests of 'the trade'.

The cabinet-makers' trade society produced a book of piece-rate prices which was given the approval of the employers and published in 1788 as The London Cabinet Makers' Book of Prices. The codification of piece-rate prices in a written list was not new. The move toward such compilations grew out of the unrest of the 1760s. In 1761, the Spitalfields weavers won from their masters an exclusive list of piece-rates and this agreement appears to have set the tone for negotiations in other trades³⁵. The carpenters, who in 1762 took action similar to that taken by the cabinet-makers in 1761 over wages, obtained a price book in 1766 but no similar agreement is known for cabinet-makers³⁶.

The London Cabinet Makers' Book of Prices was drawn up by journeymen



and presented to the masters for their approval. The men went to great pains to assure their employers that 'whoever insinuates that we mean to attempt to force upon you the prices as regulated in this work, and that our meetings (which we trust are legal) have been to concur measures hostile to your interest, are enemies to us both ...'³⁷. They also dedicated the publication to the employers in a further attempt to convince them that it was not against their interests. The first edition, which contained 143 pages of text and twenty plates, featured an engraved frontispiece, the design of which resembled that used in the 1801 trade society membership card (Plates 1 and 2) and used the motto 'UNANIMITY WITH JUSTICE'.

But unanimity with the employers was not always achieved. The piece-rate price list did not prevent frequent disputes between masters and men and, in 1793, a second edition was published. Both sides were requested to acquaint themselves thoroughly with the new publication and this seems to have been complied with because the 1,000 copies printed were quickly sold³⁸. In 1796, however, the masters attempted unilaterally to lower the rates and 'formed a new book of prices' in opposition to the one agreed in 1788³⁹. The men refused to accept the proposed wage cuts, being particularly incensed because they themselves had made no attempt to raise the rates in the years since 1788⁴⁰. A bitter strike, which lasted at least three months, ensued and showed the union well organised and determined. It called upon other trades for support and the money received, together with existing funds, meant that outgoings of up to £40 per week were covered⁴¹. The strike was apparently successful because the 1793 prices were still in use a decade later⁴².

The tenacity shown by the strikers reflected the seriousness of the threat to their livelihoods but it possibly also reflected something of the radicalism of London artisans. A strong degree of radicalism developed in the disturbed period of the 1760s and an even stronger movement emerged in

the 1790s, helped along by events in France and the writings of Tom Paine. The London Corresponding Society, founded by Thomas Hardy in January 1792, attracted London workers interested in social and political matters. It emphasised the conflicting interests of aristocracy and democracy, and proclaimed the solidarity of English reformers with the French revolutionaries'⁴³. Its main strength lay in the independent-minded craftsmen of the capital, both journeymen and small masters. Furniture-makers were among those involved: the register of one division of the society included six cabinet-makers, two carvers, two bedstead-makers and an upholsterer⁴⁴. Evenings of readings and animated discussion led not only to the spread of egalitarian ideas but also to a denunciation of legislation which penalised 'the poor journeymen who associate together ... while the rich manufacturers, the contractors, the monopolists ... may associate as they please'⁴⁵.

Fear of radicalism and strikes such as that of the cabinet-makers in 1796 was one of the reasons for the introduction of the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800, which strengthened existing legislation against trade clubs and declared all combinations illegal⁴⁶. Despite the legislation, the London artisans managed to build up 'a very high degree of organisation ... and considerable funds' in the years up to 1824 when the acts were repealed⁴⁷. Indeed, it was the opinion of the Webbs that trade unions were better organised in the years between 1799 and 1824 than at any time before⁴⁸. This was certainly true of woodworking furniture-makers. Some form of organisation was maintained and even improved: not only were piece-rate lists agreed with the masters but they were also published during these difficult years. Cabinet-makers, fancy cabinet-makers, chair-makers, carvers and bedstead-makers all obtained new or revised lists on at least one occasion, usually more, in this period.

Such evidence that journeymen managed to organise collectively

despite the legislation should not, however, be taken to suggest that the Combination Acts were almost a 'dead letter'⁴⁹. This was not so. In a period of repression and widespread fears of subversion, it is not surprising that the laws were used against workers, and furniture-makers were no exception. In 1801, John Grove appealed successfully against a conviction 'for having unlawfully entered into and been concerned with entering into a combination with other journeymen cabinet-makers to obtain an advance of wages contrary to the statute'⁵⁰. Prosecutions against combinations were often treated as prosecutions against men leaving work unfinished⁵¹ and, in 1819, for instance, a complaint was successfully brought against a journeyman cabinet-maker, Richard Bowcock, by his master, Mr. Wilkinson of Mint Street, Borough, on the grounds that he had left work unfinished for several weeks⁵².

Cabinet-makers obtained new or revised piece-rate lists in 1803, 1805, 1811 and 1824. The 1793 list was found to contain errors which were corrected in the 1803 edition which, in turn, promised the publication of a 'highly necessary' supplement for work not previously covered as soon as the 'regular' prices of those items could be selected and agreed upon⁵³. This supplement, produced by two cabinet-makers, George Atkinson and William Somerville, was published in 1805 and referred to the 'irritated and almost irreconcilable disputes that daily take place to the great inconvenience of both parties'⁵⁴. Together with the 1803 edition, it served workmen in the cabinet trade only until 1811 when both were superseded by a related publication, The London Cabinet Makers' Union Book of Prices.

The 1811 Union Book of Prices was obtained by 'force majeure'⁵⁵. The frontispiece of the 1788 book and the motto 'Unanimity with Justice' were retained to emphasise the connection with earlier publications, but the 1811 list, with 474 pages of text and eight plates, represented a substantial revision and enlargement of the old lists. The preparation of this

comprehensive statement of prices occupied a committee of masters and journeymen between two and three years⁵⁶. Members of the committee were paid for loss of time from the masters' and the journeymen's own funds, each paying their own members' expenses. The cost of attending meetings and consultations, the making and re-making of models and the cost of engraving and printing meant that the book was compiled at a total cost of £4-5,000⁵⁷. The publication was probably worth all the expense involved because, with revised editions and supplements, it served cabinet-makers, in the West End at least, until about 1880⁵⁸.

Other sections of furniture-makers were organised in trade unions during the period of the Combination Laws. The London chair-makers had achieved a degree of collective identity and self-organisation before 1799: they had taken industrial action with the cabinet-makers in 1731 and 1761⁵⁹ and given financial support to the bookbinders when they were on strike in 1786⁶⁰. In 1802, however, after a series of disputes with employers, the chair-makers and carvers who ornamented chairs obtained a piece-rate book agreed by a committee of masters and journeymen. Most of the book was devoted to chair-making, the carved work being confined to plainer items such as mouldings and reedings. It was felt that 'no precise value ... could be reasonably fixed, previous to its execution' to the more elaborate carved work which differed greatly in quality from craftsman to craftsman⁶¹. The prices of such jobs were to be settled by 'precedent and mutual agreement' and any disputes were to be referred to an arbitration committee composed of equal numbers of masters and men⁶².

This committee was unable to stop all disputes. Changes in styles and the variety of prices obtaining in different shops led to demands for a new edition. This was published in 1808 in an attempt to improve the regulation of piece-rates. Further editions and supplements were

published in 1811 and 1823 and this system of price regulation, established during the years of trade union illegality, lasted into the 1870s⁶³.

The fancy cabinet-makers also published a price book. It is not known whether or not they had formed their own trade society by 1806 when The Portable Desk-Makers and Cabinet Small-Workers London Book of Prices was published. No copy of this publication is known to survive⁶⁴ but it was probably an attempt to cover items peculiar to fancy cabinet-making which was a fairly recent specialisation⁶⁵.

Piece-rate price lists were a means by which furniture-makers and others sought to defend their wages against rising prices on the one hand and the growing threat of unapprenticed and semi-skilled labour on the other. Trade societies also tried to deal with the enforcement of apprenticeship regulations but, by about 1820, even West End cabinet-makers recognised that they could not enforce a seven-year apprenticeship. They did, however, manage to enforce a five-year training and, in 1821, William Lovett was refused membership of the Cabinet Makers' Society because he had not 'worked or served five years to the business'⁶⁶. Even in non-society shops he was met with hostility because he had not served an apprenticeship to the trade, so anxious were cabinet-makers to protect the exclusiveness of their craft⁶⁷. Lovett eventually qualified for membership of the West End Cabinet Makers' Society by working a sufficient number of years at a good shop in the trade⁶⁸. His experiences, however, indicate just how difficult it was to obtain employment in a respectable shop unless in trade society membership. Ten or twenty years later, Lovett would probably not have been allowed to join under any circumstances, so well organised was the trade society by that date⁶⁹.

When the ban on trade unions was lifted in 1824, it was not only the West End cabinet-makers, chair-makers and carvers, together with the fancy cabinet-makers, who were organised in some form of trade club. Cabinet-makers who worked in the City and the area to the north formed a society in

1818⁷⁰. West End upholsterers also formed a society in the years of illegality - one which was claimed to be flourishing in 1826 despite the fact that a great many upholsterers were still not in membership⁷¹. Furthermore, a society of bedstead-makers was established in 1824-5, shortly after the repeal of the Combination Acts⁷².

Furniture-makers, who had hitherto stood aside, joined or formed trade societies in an effort to protect themselves against the effects of the breakdown of the apprenticeship system and the rise of semi- and un-skilled labour. Upholsterers, who had held back from membership of their trade society, reviewed their attitudes when, late in 1826, the employers tried to reduce weekly wages of 36/- by 4/-⁷³. The men refused the wage cut and went on strike. The masters used 'national distress' as justification for their action but the craftsmen claimed that there was plenty of work, including commissions for several mansions and two royal palaces⁷⁴. The latter reference suggests that this was the strike by which the firm of Morel and Seddon lost 'many thousand pounds' when it re-furnished Windsor Castle for George IV⁷⁵.

As well as defending wages and negotiating piece-rate lists, trade societies looked after the welfare of their members. The insurance of tools, the means of production in furniture-making, was a central task of the early societies⁷⁶ which also looked after those members who were unemployed.

From its early days, the West End cabinet-makers' society organised a house of call system to supply information about job vacancies to members⁷⁷. The house of call, usually a public-house, was an embryonic labour exchange where a list of workshop vacancies could be consulted. As the system developed, the journeymen benefitted from information, fed into the society over the years, as to who were the best employers. Little is known about the system run by the cabinet-makers but it probably continued into the early nineteenth century when most London trade societies used this method of

informing their members about employment opportunities⁷⁸. In the 1820s, the West End society pioneered the payment of unemployment benefits on a regular basis as opposed to relying on voluntary collections or charitable donations. This practise of 'affording a subsistence' to unemployed members was one which Lovett stressed was worthy of imitation⁷⁹ but it was not until the 1840s that such benefits were generally paid in other trade societies⁸⁰.

Furniture-makers were involved in the labour exchange schemes of the 1830s with the aim of helping their unemployed to keep off the labour market and out of the 'dishonourable' trade. The labour exchanges priced goods at the cost of 6d. per hour for the time and labour of the workman who made it⁸¹ and attracted trades such as tailors, shoemakers, cabinet-makers, chair-makers and carpenters, all of which could make up goods in a small way without large amounts of capital⁸². Societies of carver and gilders, cabinet-makers and chair-makers joined the National Equitable Labour Exchange (NELE) established in 1833 under the influence of Robert Owen⁸³. Craftsmen usually joined through a trade society but one group of cabinet-makers formed themselves into a trade society only after working together in this venture⁸⁴. The scheme was short-lived but the experience taught the craftsmen a lesson not only in ways of coping with unemployment but also in co-operation with each other.

The general upsurge in trade union activities in the early 1830s, particularly in the years 1833-4, was reflected in the activities of London furniture-makers. Trade societies sprang up in areas where furniture-makers had hitherto been unorganised and specialisations not previously catered for were also unionised. In 1834, fancy cabinet-makers formed their own society, which met in Clerkenwell⁸⁵ and, at about the same time, a group of East End cabinet-makers formed a trade society⁸⁶. In 1830, the societies representing carver and gilders in London united, inspired by the movement towards wider

unions which hoped to break down some of the sectionalism of the early craft trade societies, but unfortunately this attempt to overcome local divisions failed and, in 1834, the craftsmen were divided into three societies with a total membership of about 220⁸⁹. Outside the capital, however, certain cabinet-makers overcame their sectional attitudes and, in 1833, a national union of cabinet-makers, the Friendly Society of Operative Cabinet Makers (FSOCM), was founded with its headquarters in Liverpool. It represented 1,020 members in twenty-seven towns and cities, including Manchester, Liverpool, Bristol and Dublin, but London societies did not join⁸⁸. This move towards uniting all the workpeople in the craft within a single national union was probably influenced by Owenite ideas of general trade unionism, which culminated in the foundation in 1834 of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union (GNCTU)⁹⁰. East End cabinet-makers, chair-makers and carver and gilders all affiliated to the GNCTU⁹¹, indicating that these groups at least sought to protect their interests in an organisation which extended beyond their own sectional trade interests.

The East End cabinet-makers who affiliated to the GNCTU in 1834 were not sufficiently skilled to join the national union of cabinet-makers established in Liverpool in 1833, which represented the highest paid cabinet-makers. On the other hand, the West End cabinet-makers society could have played a leading role in this body, which aimed at uniting all skilled cabinet-makers and defending their privileged position, had it chosen to do so. But, always conscious of a superiority and traditions which set it apart from other societies, it remained aloof and did not join until 1877⁹².

The West End society, however, did not restrict itself to craft interests as is shown by the involvement of William Lovett, an active member of the society, in the agitation to release the six Dorset labourers, known as the Tolpuddle Martyrs, who were tried, arrested and eventually deported in

1834 because of trade union activities⁹³. Lovett was the secretary of the committee established in London to secure the freedom of the Dorset men⁹⁴ and the society of cabinet-makers which was affiliated to this committee was probably his own branch⁹⁵.

Lovett, a dedicated 'self-improver', is in some ways representative of the skilled London artisan who interested himself in the radical and educational societies which flourished in the capital in the 1830s and 40s. Some of these radical ideas were reflected in the policies of the trade societies to which the artisans belonged, although, of course, not all trade society members were radicals. Lovett was a member of countless educational societies and a supporter of ventures he hoped would lead 'towards the social independence of the labouring classes'⁹⁶. He was encouraged in his endeavours by a fellow trade society member, David Todd, a native of Peebles and 'one of the most intelligent, kind-hearted and best disposed of men'⁹⁷. Todd not only secured Lovett jobs which enabled him to qualify for entry into the West End cabinet-makers' society⁹⁸ but, in 1825, he also introduced Lovett to 'The Liberals', a small literary society composed, in the main, of working men⁹⁹. Small weekly subscriptions went towards the purchase of books, which were circulated amongst the members, and one of the two weekly meetings was reserved for the discussion of either 'literary, political, or metaphysical' topics. Lovett largely concerned himself with politics and the questioning of orthodox interpretations of Christianity¹⁰⁰.

In his eagerness for education, Lovett joined the first Mechanics' Institute soon after it was founded in 1823 and was also a regular visitor to some of the main debating places of the day¹⁰¹. He was also involved in co-operative associations; he was store-keeper to the First London Cooperative Trading Association in Red Lion Square and was later honorary secretary of the British Association for Promoting Cooperative Knowledge which was founded in 1829¹⁰². Other activities included work in the

Association of Working Men to Procure a Cheap and Honest Press. With him in this association and many others worked Richard Moore¹⁰³, a cabinet-carver of 'considerable mental achievements'¹⁰⁴ who served several terms of imprisonment during the fight to abolish stamps on newspapers¹⁰⁵.

Lovett and other radicals who belonged to trade societies joined the GNCTU in the hope of inducing that body to declare its support for universal manhood suffrage. They were unsuccessful: the main aim of the GNCTU remained 'to obtain a fair standard of wages by combinations and strikes'¹⁰⁶. But Lovett became increasingly convinced that industrial militancy without political power was unlikely to benefit the working classes and it is for his involvement in Chartism that he is best remembered. He was a founder of the Working Men's Association (WMA), an educational body concerned with political reforms, established in June 1836. This group included, for a short while, many important trade unionists and working class leaders in London and drafted a Reform Bill for introduction to Parliament which developed into the People's Charter¹⁰⁷. This document, a re-statement of the then familiar case for full parliamentary democracy based on manhood suffrage, came to be the focal point of the largely working class movement known as Chartism.

Lovett is best remembered as a Chartist but, although he was in many ways typical of the respectable, educated, skilled craftsman who were the backbone of the West End trade societies, he was not typical of the London craftsmen who gave their support to the Chartist movement. Lovett's own account of Chartism has been partly responsible for the view that London Chartism was dominated by an 'aristocracy' of highly skilled and educated craftsmen¹⁰⁸. This was not the case, however, particularly after 1840 when Chartism developed as a mass movement in London, with strong links with the trade societies¹⁰⁹. When it did so, Lovett turned his back on it, refusing

to join the National Charter Association which was founded in 1840 and, thereafter, was on the fringes of the movement. The over-emphasis placed on Lovett's role within Chartism, however, should not detract from the role he played in starting a movement demanding radical change. Nor should it detract from his standing in the London trade union movement: he was secretary to the committee which spoke on behalf of the unions to a Parliamentary enquiry into trade unionism in 1838¹¹⁰. Furthermore, his own trade society raised sufficient money within the labour movement to support Lovett's wife and daughter when his activities sent him to prison in 1839-40¹¹¹.

To point out that Lovett, a cabinet-maker, was not typical of the metropolitan artisans who supported Chartism in the 1840s is not to say that cabinet-makers and other furniture-makers were not involved. Indeed, they were involved to a greater degree in the 1840s than in the years when Lovett led the movement. They were not so active as shoemakers or tailors, whose trades were more seriously threatened by sweating, but furniture-makers, particularly those from sections of the trade which felt more immediately threatened by low wages, unemployment or displacement by unapprenticed labour, were involved in the Chartist movement¹¹². One of the groups which affiliated to the Charter campaign in 1842, the peak of Chartist organisation and agitation in London, comprised carver and gilders¹¹³. These men were skilled craftsmen but did not form the élite of their trade. The most highly-skilled carvers stood apart from involvement in trade matters, let alone political issues. In 1841, at a time when some of their fellow furniture-workers were arguing in support of The Charter, about seventy leading 'artistic' wood carvers formed not a trade society but an association for 'the advancement of their art' to which they welcomed employers¹¹⁴. The Art Union considered that these men were not sufficiently remunerated for their skills, arguing that they should be paid 'something beyond the wages

of journeymen mechanics'¹¹⁵. These men impressed Henry Mayhew more than any other group of workers with whom he met in his investigations into the metropolitan workforce¹¹⁶. It was, however, the 'refining character of their craft' and their consciousness of their superiority over fellow workers that led these carvers to reject trade unionism: in 1850 they had neither benefit society nor a body to regulate their wages¹¹⁷. The gulf between these 'élite' carvers and those further down their craft was great.

To Iorwerth Prothero's emphasis on the important part played by the less 'aristocratic' trades in metropolitan Chartism¹¹⁸, must be added the differences between the more and less skilled workers in each craft. Cabinet-makers were more generally threatened by 'sweating' than carvers or upholsterers¹¹⁹, but within each craft some workers were more vulnerable than others. It was the latter who proved the staunchest supporters of Chartism. Even within trade societies which supported Chartism, however, there were those who voiced dissent. At a meeting called in 1847 to discuss action against wage reductions, for instance, an East End carver objected to a move to affiliate to the National Association of United Trades (NAUT)¹²⁰. This body was established in 1845 after the spread of 'sweating' and widespread distress convinced certain craftsmen, shoemakers and tailors in particular, of the futility of working in small societies¹²¹. The carver, whose name was Howard, objected because he did not like other trades 'interfering' with his¹²². Furthermore, he considered a reference to hardships an insult to his personal dignity and ability to earn his own living. The unemployment amongst the carvers and chair-makers present at the meeting, however, ensured that the meeting overwhelmingly supported affiliation to the NAUT¹²³. Within that body there was considerable debate as to whether trade demands or political reforms should have priority but

in 1847 and 1848, years of severe economic hardship, Chartist views prevailed¹²⁴. In 1848, thirty per cent of the membership of the West End cabinet-makers' society was out of work¹²⁵ and the situation was as bad, if not worse, in other sections of the trade. By 1848, even the West End 'aristocratic' upholsterers were so badly affected by hard times that they argued for the need to work together with other trades¹²⁶.

As early as 1844, the upholsterers had established a Working Upholsterers' Institute in Great Marlborough Street, in the West End¹²⁷. This originated as a club where craftsmen could meet and discuss trade and educational issues away from the distracting atmosphere of the public-house but by 1848 it was also used as a meeting place for the unemployed of that trade. It was they who, in March 1848, called a meeting of delegates from the London trades to discuss action to combat the distressed situation in which they found themselves¹²⁸. The meeting was attended by carpenters, coach-makers, chair-makers, compositors, masons, cabinet-makers, upholsterers, tailors and weavers and, the following week, over one hundred delegates attended a fuller meeting at The Bell, Old Bailey, a customary meeting place of the London trades¹²⁹.

The different interests of the various trades as well as different views as to the solution of the problems were clearly revealed at the second meeting. An East End cabinet-maker recognised the significance of a meeting attended by 'aristocratic' as well as other sections of the trades and 'looked on it as the beginning of a more brotherly feeling. (Loud cheers)',¹³⁰. He went on to argue that 'slop' selling undoubtedly injured all trades and proceeded to detail the problems that the slop trade had brought to cabinet-making. While the main problem faced by cabinet-makers was sweated labour, however, for upholsterers it was foreign imports. The compositors had different problems again: they wanted a repeal of advertisement and stamp duties. The silk weavers spoke of the great harm

done by free trade while the carpenters wanted taxes on raw materials removed¹³¹.

The debate as to whether a political solution was necessary included furniture-makers adopting opposing viewpoints. One cabinet-maker, for instance, objected to the inclusion of any political matter at trades' meetings whilst another made a strong speech, complete with glowing references to the French provisional government, in favour of political action. In view of the disagreements, Mr. O'Leary, a gilder and Chartist, argued that the question of the Charter should be raised if Parliament did not grant the various trades what they were demanding. However, the meeting finally passed a resolution in support of the Charter, together with one on full employment. A committee, which was established to draw up an address, included three furniture-makers¹³² and later reported that, of the 200,000 skilled workers in the capital, only one third had full-time work and they often received greatly reduced wages¹³³. The fusion of radical and labour issues in the quest for a solution to this problem brought a greater number of craftsmen to advocate radical political reforms than ever before.

With the collapse of Chartism in London after 1848 and the improved economic conditions of the 1850s, however, the attentions of furniture-makers turned elsewhere. Not all Chartist ideas died in 1848¹³⁴ but, in general in 1850, politics, apart from the news of the day, was not much discussed in furniture-making workshops¹³⁵. In the fancy trade, the structure of the trade and the increase in 'sweating' further militated against any interest in politics and Mayhew noted that the fancy cabinet-makers were far less politically-minded in 1850 than they had been a decade earlier. The number of men who worked on their own had increased rapidly in the 1840s and this broke down interest in collective organisation on a trade basis, let alone in politics¹³⁶. The prevalence of the 'slop'

trade meant that conditions were grim, even for those who belonged to a society. The latter worked mainly in Clerkenwell where conditions were only slightly better than those which prevailed in Bethnal Green and Spitalfields where there was no trade union organisation at all¹³⁷. Mayhew considered the fancy cabinet-makers uninformed but 'patient, temperate and resigned'. The very consideration of politics was a luxury to those trying, from week to week, to keep their heads above water. As one fancy cabinet-maker remarked 'politics sir ... what's politics to me, compared to getting my dinner and what's getting my dinner compared to getting food for my children?'¹³⁸.

Trade society membership was, in the opinion of Henry Mayhew, the outward distinguishing feature between the 'honourable' and 'dishonourable' trade, between the 'better class of workman' and the worse¹³⁹. In 1850, less than 10% of London tradesmen were unionised¹⁴⁰. The figure for cabinet-makers was higher than average: 18% of West End cabinet-makers were trade society members, as were 12% of those who worked in the East End¹⁴¹. At the same time, only about 9% of fancy cabinet-makers and bedstead-makers and 8% of chair-makers were unionised¹⁴². But trade society membership did not provide automatic protection against the 'slop' trade. The 200-300 carvers in Moorfields, Bethnal Green and the Curtain Road area did not work to an established scale of prices in the 1850s because their trade society had been unable to retain control over prices¹⁴³. Other trade societies also proved unable to provide immunity from the effects of the 'slop' trade. Despite society membership, fancy cabinet-makers and East End cabinet-makers were paid by 'the lump', i.e. at a given price for an article with no allowance for extras¹⁴⁴. In 1852, it was claimed that the East End cabinet-makers' society did no more than ensure that new workers did not undercut rates already agreed in a shop and was unable to guarantee standard prices across shops¹⁴⁵. Although the West End society stood out for full prices

as agreed in the piece-rate books, even there the best-paid cabinet jobs were sometimes transferred to day rates to avoid high earnings. Another device to deflate earnings was to keep men waiting for work. Both practices were alleged to take place in closed shops, where every cabinet-maker belonged to a trade society. It was further claimed that some society members in other shops signed for jobs at the full rate and secretly agreed to deductions of 10% or more¹⁴⁶. Such were the effects of competition from the 'dishonourable' trade which, with its cheaper goods and low wages, continually threatened the furniture-makers in the 'honourable' sector.

In this situation, it was essential that trade societies offered their members protection against unemployment, sickness, loss of tools and other catastrophies. The West End cabinet-makers' and chair-makers' societies, which charged the highest weekly fees of 6d, offered the best benefits¹⁴⁷. Chair-makers were compensated for loss of time because of fire as well as having their tools insured. The replacement of a complete set of cabinet-making tools cost between £30 and £40 and, between 1836 and 1850, the West End cabinet-makers' society spent £1,758 insuring tools, members paying 1s 6d per quarter towards the cost. East End cabinet-makers, whose weekly membership fee was 4d, paid lower insurance rates than their West End colleagues either because they could not afford more or possibly because their tools were worth less¹⁴⁸. To counteract the problem of the varying value of tools, the bedstead-makers' society offered insurance at optional values of £12, £18 or £25¹⁴⁹.

Unemployment benefit was one of the most important safeguards offered by a trade society. In 1850, out-of-work West End cabinet-makers received 10/- per week but for only a limited period. Chair-makers received the same amount. The East End cabinet-makers' society paid 8/- per week but unemployed members of the fancy cabinet-makers' society received amounts varying from 2/- to 6/- per week, depending upon the state of funds¹⁵⁰. They

fared better than members of the bedstead-makers' society, however, which had not provided unemployment relief for some years before mid-century¹⁵¹.

Although in 1850 furniture-makers generally frowned upon strike action, preferring arbitration, the better organised societies offered strike pay of about half the average weekly wage. This was substantially higher than unemployment benefit. The chair-makers' society paid most: £1 for the first four weeks (10/- more than unemployment pay) and 16/- per week thereafter (6/- higher than unemployment pay) while East End members received 15/- per week (9/- higher than unemployment pay)¹⁵². The fancy cabinet-makers and bedstead-makers were unable to organise such relief¹⁵³.

The regular benefits to which furniture-makers were entitled as a result of paying union dues all concerned their trade. Other benefits such as sick pay or relief to the old remained voluntary and irregular in 1850. None of the furniture-makers' trade societies paid regular superannuation or sick pay but the chair-makers organised a scheme to provide sickness relief by 'paying persons to collect voluntary subscriptions', the average collection amounting to about £5¹⁵⁴. The other trade societies probably ran similar schemes, perhaps less formally organised with unpaid collectors. Most journeymen subscribed to friendly societies as their main buffer against sickness and they also organised sick clubs in the workshops¹⁵⁵. Friendly societies were the main provider of funeral insurance¹⁵⁶ but trade societies also made some effort to assist with funeral expenses. In 1827-8, for instance, a cabinet-makers' society provided a sum of money paid to relatives in the event of death¹⁵⁷ but, in 1850, Mayhew noted only the chair-makers as providing any funeral benefits¹⁵⁸. Other societies probably organised them through voluntary collections, if not on a more formal basis.

Trade union organisation generally flourished in the period of

economic stability between 1848 and 1874 when there were only two economic crises - those of 1859 and 1866. In this period, a new society of cabinet-makers was organised on a national basis and french-polishers were unionised for the first time. Although they had worked in the furniture trade since the early nineteenth century, it was not until 1852 that polishers in the West End formed a trade society¹⁵⁹. They paid 1d. per week to cover expenses and build up a contingency fund. Their normal meeting place was the Fish and Bell in Charles Street, Soho Square, but they also used other public-houses in the area where lists of employers wanting men were kept¹⁶⁰. Polish makers and dealers also kept registers of employers with job vacancies. In 1853, a Metropolitan Operative French Polishers' Society was established, the name suggesting that it extended beyond the West End, where its initial meeting was held and, before the end of the year, a separate East End branch was established¹⁶¹. This society was the main organisation of french polishers but there were a variety of others formed between 1862 and 1892, before the most important of them amalgamated in 1894 to form the Amalgamated Society of French Polishers¹⁶².

Twelve societies of furniture-makers were listed in the United Kingdom First Annual Trades Union Directory published in 1861. A West End cabinet-makers' society, with approximately 300 members, met weekly, and an East End society met fortnightly. The latter had about forty to fifty members and was known to employers as the 'forty thieves'¹⁶³. There were three different West End societies for upholsterers, all of which met once a month. Besides these, it listed two societies of chair-makers and carvers and three societies of carver and gilders, all of which met once a month in the Oxford Street area, as well as two french-polishers' societies¹⁶⁴. In 1865, however, a new cabinet-makers' society was established, The Alliance Cabinet Makers Association (ACMA), which was to have a considerable impact on the unionisation of furniture-makers in London. The ACMA, which attempted

to bring together small trade societies into a national organisation, was born out of a movement to secure a 10% wage increase for London's non-society cabinet-makers in a period of general trade union militancy when trade was good¹⁶⁵. Workmen representing over 600 craftsmen from the principal shops in the east and northern districts of London met in October 1865 to organise the campaign and negotiate with employers representing about 180 shops, including Maple, one of the largest shops in the Tottenham Court Road area. After threatening to withdraw men from shops if their demands were not met, the organisation won its demands and, by January 1866, membership stood at over 700¹⁶⁶. Contributions to the new society were 3d per week as compared with the 6d per week paid in 1850 by West End cabinet-makers whose wages were better. Although many Alliance members received 5d per hour after the 10% wage increase of 1865, the society was not able to enforce this and, as the boom ended to be followed by depression in 1866, individual price agreements were reached in individual shops¹⁶⁷. By 1868, membership stood at only 159 and the union had lost much of its base amongst the poorer East End cabinet-makers. It then extended out from its nucleus of members in the north of London to establish a West End branch¹⁶⁸. By the early 1870s, it represented the workforce of Jackson and Graham¹⁶⁹, one of the leading comprehensive firms¹⁷⁰. But, despite a footing in the West End trade, the ACMA did not gain in strength until it turned again to less skilled workers.

The ACMA amalgamated with the East End cabinet-makers' society in 1872 (the 'forty thieves' then numbered sixty-six) and the fancy cabinet-makers formed a branch of the ACMA in the same year¹⁷¹. Nearly all members won a 10% wage increase in 1872 and, in 1873, the society extended beyond London for the first time when the Manchester Amalgamated Society of Cabinet-Makers and Chair-Makers joined¹⁷². The London Society of Continental Cabinet-Makers (mostly German immigrants) followed in 1873 and the East London Chair-

makers and Carvers joined in the following year¹⁷³. The ACMA was a strong national union of skilled but lesser-paid cabinet-makers. The FSOCM recognised the progress made by the ACMA but felt that it stood for different principles, fearing the threat of less-skilled men whom it considered brought down wages and produced inferior work¹⁷⁴.

The West End Cabinet-Makers' Society stood aloof from both the FSOCM and the ACMA until 1877 when, after approximately one hundred years of independence as a small local trade society, its 388 members joined the FSOCM which, by then, was centrally organised with a full-time General Secretary¹⁷⁵. The old West End society did not abandon its 'natural desire' to maintain its 'integrity as an independent society' readily. It did so because of the difficulties experienced in maintaining wage rates, even in the best shops, after the mid-1870s. This factor, the growing rivalry of the ACMA and the honouring of a debt of over £200 borrowed from the West End society in 1857 by the Liverpool branch of the FSOCM, swayed the society in favour of amalgamation¹⁷⁶.

After about 1875, when the effects of the cheap trade were felt increasingly strongly, upholsterers' trade societies suffered in similar ways to trade societies of other furniture-makers. There were three West End trade societies for upholsterers in 1861 but these represented only a small percentage of the trade¹⁷⁷. The percentage of upholsterers unionised in 1888 was only about 6-7% of the total and even this figure is greater than for the 1870s when the society still insisted on every member being a 'superior' upholsterer in all branches of the trade¹⁷⁸. While the society insisted on craft exclusiveness, however, the 'slop' trade continued and the society's membership only began to increase in the 1880s as a result of abandoning some of the entry requirements¹⁷⁹.

The first attempts at organising the women who worked in the upholstery trade were made in the 1870s as a result of the activities of the

Women's Trade Union League¹⁸⁰ but the unionisation of women in the furniture trades lies outside this study. Similarly, the East End upholsterers were not unionised until the late 1880s and it was not until 1891 that a national union, the Amalgamated Upholsterers' Union, was founded¹⁸¹. The London societies joined in the following year. After the formation of the Amalgamated Upholsterers' Union in 1891, the ACMA began to open its doors to furniture-makers other than woodworkers as well as to unskilled workers. The ACMA amalgamated with the Scottish United Cabinet and Chair-makers Association in 1901 to form the National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades Association (NAFTA)¹⁸². French-polishers, gilders, chair-carvers and female upholsterers joined before the First World War. In 1918, the United Furniture Trades Society (the body which the old West End cabinet-makers' society had joined in 1877) and the East End Cabinet-Makers' Society joined. It was not until 1947, however, that a national union of all furniture-makers was achieved when the National Union of Furniture Trade Operatives (NUFTO) was formed by the amalgamation of NAFTA and the Amalgamated Upholsterers' Union¹⁸³.

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C O N C L U S I O N

CONCLUSION

Furniture-making in London changed considerably, though not dramatically, between 1700 and 1870. One craft, softwood carving, was virtually eliminated. Perhaps the most skilled of all the furniture-making crafts, it was superseded in the early nineteenth century by the use of artificial materials and machine-cut mouldings. The other crafts were affected to varying degrees by the division of labour. In the quality trade, the division of labour largely facilitated the elaboration of skills rather than diluted them. There was some division of labour according to the goods produced in different shops in the quality trade. Some of the smaller shops did not manufacture the full range of furniture made in the larger shops and therefore craftsmen who worked in the former did not work on certain pieces of furniture. This mainly affected cabinet-makers. However, they were rarely restricted to only one or two items and those they did make were made in their entirety, without sub-divided labour. In each craft, the division of labour based on routine, repetitive and relatively unskilled labour took place, by and large, in the cheaper end of the trade. The latter was dependent upon labour based on small repetitive tasks carried out by unskilled workers by 1870.

By that date, few apprentice furniture-makers were bound for seven years. The all-round craft training associated with the traditional apprenticeship was retained only in the quality trade, albeit in a modified form for a reduced number of years. The better-class West End firms only took on a small number of apprentices and gave them a thorough craft training. They also offered their journeymen the chance to work at most aspects of their particular craft because they produced a wide variety of furniture. Elsewhere in the metropolitan trade, by 1870, the apprenticeship system had completely collapsed with the result that cheap and sub-divided labour was the norm.

Although the London companies attempted to halt the erosion of the guild system, the lack of control over standards of work and apprenticeship, together with pressure from employers to abolish restriction on whom they engaged, meant that by the mid-eighteenth century there was little to convince journeymen furniture-makers that they could look to the guilds, of which many of them were members, for protection. They formed their own institutions, into which they took some of the guild traditions, and protected 'the trade' no less fiercely than the guilds. These trade societies of journeymen furniture-makers form an important, if as yet largely unacknowledged, part of trade union history.

The major change in the organisation of furniture-making firms in the years 1700 to 1870 began in the first half of the eighteenth century with the entrepreneurial activity which established the comprehensive manufacturing firm. This unit of production brought together in one place the main furniture-making crafts so that complete items of furniture could be made, and also retailed, by a single enterprise. These firms dominated the manufacture of furniture in London until about 1870, by which date they were seriously challenged by 'linen-drappers', i.e. shops that did not manufacture all of the furniture which they sold, buying in goods from the East End. This challenge eventually brought about the demise of the comprehensive manufacturing firm in the quarter century after 1870.

Cabinet-makers, upholsterers and carvers were the main craftsmen-entrepreneurs who played a part in the development of the comprehensive manufacturing firm. However, whatever their craft background, or the type of firm from which they developed their businesses, the owners of comprehensive manufacturing firms all had the same aims - to bring together various aspects of furniture production within one enterprise and to make a profit. It was within these large manufacturing concerns that the division between the craft,

managerial and design functions of furniture-makers was first apparent. The growth in the size and scope of furniture-making firms meant that there was little time for the owner, or owners, themselves to handle the tools of their trade and directly engage in production. That was left to journeymen and apprentices. Entrepreneurs, by and large, retained a craft background but, from the second quarter of the nineteenth century, an increasing number of those who established furniture-making firms had no previous association with the trade.

After the shedding of the craft function, came the delegation of certain managerial tasks. The entrepreneur furniture-maker, however, did not abandon his managerial function as he did that of craft and design but rather shed some tasks in order to devote more time to other aspects of managing the business. The development of the specialist designer was a lengthy process which brought about the final separation between craftsman, designer and entrepreneur. The craft-trained designer who was also a businessman was a feature of the quality trade in the eighteenth century. In contrast to men such as Thomas Chippendale and John Linnell, who combined the roles of designer and entrepreneur, the owners of the leading firms of the nineteenth century began to hire designers. This took place on an ad hoc basis at first and it was not until the 1860s that the leading firms employed professional designers on a regular basis.

There were considerable financial rewards for those entrepreneurs who were fortunate enough to avoid or weather the many risks associated with running a furniture-making firm in London in the years 1700-1870. Some were able to establish themselves as what Defoe termed 'gentlemen'-tradesmen¹. A few went further and made the transition from businessman to gentleman. Most furniture-makers, however, including those in the quality trade, remained in the social group into which they were born, that of tradesmen.

Although the garret-masters of the East End were independent small producers, their wretched existence was markedly different from that of small masters in the quality trade and a world apart from that of the larger 'gentlemen'-tradesmen.

Most furniture-makers showed little concern for the pursuit of innovation and invention even in an age 'running made after innovation', according to Dr. Johnson². Those who did concern themselves with such issues were usually entrepreneurs and their patents were mainly concerned with relatively small matters of practical importance in the workshops. By contrast, they were little concerned with the development of either spiral springing or metal bedsteads, both of which had important repercussions for the furniture trade in the nineteenth century. Nor were they greatly concerned with the development of machinery, be it that which affected the furniture-making process itself, such as carving or jointing machines, or that which only affected preparatory processes such as cutting and planing.

Although furniture-makers generally played little part in the development of new technology which affected their trade, the larger furniture-making firms used some steam-powered machinery by 1870. It was small in comparison to other sectors of the economy but, nevertheless, the use of machinery and large-scale workshops raises the question of how far furniture-making was part of the factory system by 1870. Historians have paid a great deal of attention to the development of the factory system which is seen as a distinguishing feature of modern industry. They generally agree that it is defined by the concentration and multiplication of the means of production in large scale units involving heavy capital outlay: expensive machinery that forced entrepreneurs to consider ways of keeping it in more or less constant use: a minute division of labour regulated by the detailed jobs performed by machines and the regimentation of labour disciplined by

supervisors³. Increased output and the speed with which work was completed were all important. This system is usually contrasted to workshop production where manufacture took place on a less concentrated scale. Relatively small amounts of capital were needed to start a firm which employed skilled handicraftsmen, who retained a greater degree of control over their working conditions than factory operatives. Craftsmanship and quality production are associated with this latter system of manufacture whereas cheap goods were the outcome of the factory system.

By these definitions, the large-scale comprehensive manufacturing units which dominated the West End trade, particularly in the years 1850 to 1870, were not part of a 'classic' factory or workshop system of production. They were essentially workshops which displayed some, but by no means all, of the features of the factory system. The size of the larger firms, which stood at approximately 350 to upwards of 600 (with one firm employing as many as 1,000 on occasions) in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, indicates that, if numbers employed was the only criterion used, they were organised on a sufficiently large scale to be considered as part of the factory system. Machinery and the division of labour, however, are the two main factors deemed to distinguish the factory system of production. As far as machinery is concerned, it could be used in either preparatory, manufacturing or finishing processes within the factory system⁴ and that installed by the leading comprehensive manufacturing firms by 1870 places them firmly within the factory system. On the other hand, on the question of the division of labour, these comprehensive firms which manufactured for the quality trade do not qualify to be considered as part of the factory system because they retained the all-round handicraft skills of a variety of craftsmen. Output per worker was not increased by the division of labour in the quality trade. The entrepreneur increased

his profits by the concentration of several manufacturing processes under one roof and by expanding the size of his business. Although hand labour was replaced by machinery in a few small jobs by about 1870, the craftsmen retained and used most of their handicraft skills which were not sub-divided into several different repetitive tasks. Furthermore, because detailed supervision was in its infancy in furniture-making in London in 1870, even in the larger firms, the craftsmen also retained a degree of independence not associated with the factory system.

The division of labour and increased productivity were the hall-marks, not of the large furniture-making workshops which went some of the way towards being part of the factory system, but of the sub-contract system in the cheaper end of the trade. The trade societies tried, not always successfully, to protect their members from conditions which prevailed in the 'slop' trade which had developed from about 1820. Indeed, by the mid-nineteenth century, society membership itself had become almost synonymous with working in the 'honourable' trade. In 1870, the gulf between those in the 'honourable' and 'dishonourable' sectors of the trade was enormous. The latter, with its pool of cheap and relatively unskilled labour, was a greater threat to the journeymen of the West End than the new machinery, foremen or managers. It was the sub-contract system, upon which the 'dishonourable' trade was based, which was the cause of the decline of the comprehensive manufacturing unit and the West End quality trade as a whole after about 1870.

Footnotes

- 1 Daniel Defoe, The Complete English Tradesman, 2nd ed. (1927) with supplement, reprinted Kelly, New York, 1969, vol. 1, p. 313
- 2 T. S. Ashton, The Industrial Revolution 1760-1830, rev. ed., New York, 1964, pp. 10-14
- 3 Phyllis Deane, The First Industrial Revolution, 1969, pp. 84, 87-8 + 94, Paul Mantoux, The Industrial Revolution in the Eighteenth Century, rev. ed., 1961, pp. 25-9 + 35-9, and Ashton, op. cit., pp. 24-5, 51 + 78-82
- 4 Mantoux, op. cit., p. 39

A P P E N D I X I

APPENDIX ITABLE 1

<u>Origins of Apprentices Bound to London Furniture-Makers¹</u>		
	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Apprentice upholsterers 1712-45</u>		
total number with address recorded	27	100
from London	10	37
outside London	17	63
<u>Apprentice cabinet-makers 1712-48</u>		
total number with address recorded	78	100
from London	51	65
outside London	27	35
<u>Apprentice gilders 1713-47</u>		
total number with address recorded	9	100
from London	6	67
outside London	3	33
<u>Apprentice carvers 1712-49</u>		
total number with address recorded	48	100
from London	41	85
outside London	7	15
<u>Apprentice carver and gilders 1719-46</u>		
total number with address recorded	14	100
from London	13	93
outside London	1	7

1 Information taken from PRO IR1

TABLE 2 (Appendix I)

<u>Origins of Apprentices Bound to London Furniture-Makers</u> ¹		
	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Apprentice carvers</u>		
<u>1773-7</u>		
total number with address recorded	18	100
from London	12	67
outside London	6	33
<u>1783-7</u>		
total number with address recorded	4	100
from London	3	75
outside London	1	25
<u>Apprentice carver and gilders</u>		
<u>1773-7</u>		
total number with address recorded	4	100
from London	4	100
outside London	0	0
<u>1783-7</u>		
total number with address recorded	7	100
from London	5	71
outside London	2	29
<u>1793-7</u>		
total number with address recorded	7	100
from London	7	100
outside London	0	0

continued ...

<u>Table 2 (Appendix I) (continued)</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Apprentice carver and gilders (continued)</u>		
<u>1803-7</u>		
total number with address recorded	3	100
from London	2	67
outside London	1	33
<u>1813-17</u>		
total number with address recorded	1	100
from London	1	100
outside London	0	0
<u>Apprentice cabinet-makers</u>		
<u>1773-7</u>		
total number with address recorded	20	100
from London	9	45
outside London	11	55
<u>1783-7</u>		
total number with address recorded	22	100
from London	14	64
outside London	8	36
<u>1793-7</u>		
total number with address recorded	19	100
from London	14	74
outside London	5	26
<u>1803-7</u>		
total number with address recorded	13	100
from London	7	54
outside London	6	46
<u>1813-17</u>		
total number with address recorded	9	100
from London	7	78
outside London	2	22

TABLE 3

<u>Apprentice Furniture-Makers from Home Counties</u>			
<u>Craft</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>As percentage of provincial apprentices</u>	<u>Source</u>
cabinet-maker	1712-71	31	IR/JCR
cabinet-maker	1773-1817	66	JCR
upholsterer	1712-71	25	IR/JCR

TABLE 4

<u>Parental Occupation : Apprentice Furniture-Makers</u>				
	<u>Number</u>	<u>1712-41 (IR) % of total</u>	<u>1773-1817 (JCR) % of total</u>	<u>Number</u>
A. APPRENTICE CABINET-MAKERS				
Tradesman*	17	71	69	55
Gentleman	2	8	11	9
Yeoman	3	13	2.5	2
Farmer	0	0	5	4
Labourer	0	0	5	4
Husbandman	0	0	2.5	2
Merchant	0	0	2.5	2
Broker	0	0	2.5	2
Clerk	1	4	0	0
Rector	1	4	0	0
<u>Total</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>80</u>
* cabinet-maker	1	4	1.25	1
B. APPRENTICE UPHOLSTERERS				
Tradesman*	4	45	75	9
Gentleman	2	22	25	3
Yeoman	2	22	0	0
Rector	1	11	0	0
<u>Total</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>12</u>
* upholsterer	1	11	0	0
* cabinet-maker	0	0	8	1
C. APPRENTICE CARVERS				
Tradesman*	19	76	83	10
Gentleman	4	16	17	2
Farmer	1	4	0	0
Labourer	1	4	0	0
<u>Total</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>12</u>
* cabinet-maker			8	1
D. APPRENTICE CARVER AND GILDER				
Tradesman*	4	80	69	16
Gentleman	1	20	22	5
Yeoman	0	0	4.5	1
Labourer	0	0	4.5	1
<u>Total</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>23</u>
* carver and gilder			9	2

TABLE 5

<u>Parental occupation of boys bound to cabinet-makers 1768-77 (JCR)</u>		
	<u>Number</u>	<u>% of total</u>
Farmer	5	10
Yeoman	4	8
Butcher	3	6
Victualler	3	6
Cabinet-maker	2	4
Labourer	2	4
Grocer	2	4
Blacksmith	2	4
Brewer	2	4
Innholder	2	4
Plumber	2	4
Joiner	1	2
Baker	1	2
Blanket maker	1	2
Clerk	1	2
Cheesemonger	1	2
Citizen and Clothworker	1	2
Citizen and Plumber	1	2
Cooper	1	2
Chinaman	1	2
Coach harness maker	1	2
Coachman	1	2
Gentleman	1	2
Gentleman of the Victualling Office	1	2
Goldsmith	1	2
Leather Dresser	1	2
Malster	1	2
Poulterer	1	2
Spectacle maker	1	2
Sail maker	1	2
<u>Total</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>100</u>

TABLE 6

<u>Average premiums: 7-year apprenticeships 1711-1808 (IR)</u>						
<u>date</u>	<u>cabinet-maker</u>	<u>upholsterer</u>	<u>carver</u>	<u>gilder</u>	<u>carver and gilder</u>	<u>chair-maker</u>
	£	£	£	£	£	£
1711-19	11	27	9	5	10	-
1720-29	18	31	8	7	8	5
1730-39	14	29	13	5	13	20
1740-49	21	33	17	18	13	10
1750-59	20	37	20	11	17	9
1760-69	20	45	21	17	32	15
1770-79	22	53	23	9	22	10
1780-89	24	52	22	11	25	9
1790-99	26	53	19	19	19	12
1800-1808	29	49	21	7	44	16
<u>Average premiums: apprenticeships of less than 7 years 1711-1808 (IR)</u>						
1711-19	53	49	-	-	-	-
1720-29	10	18	10	5	-	-
1730-39	42	13	19	-	-	-
1740-49	10	20	10	-	-	-
1750-59	18	35	13	-	-	20
1760-69	20	36	30	5	-	-
1770-79	23	40	12	12	44	-
1780-89	33	48	26	-	-	-
1790-99	25	48	18	10	-	13
1800-1808	34	55	34	10	-	18
<u>Average premiums: apprenticeships of more than 7 years 1711-1808 (IR)</u>						
1711-19	-	-	-	5	-	-
1720-29	15	-	-	-	-	-
1730-39	26	-	-	-	-	-
1740-49	-	-	10	-	-	6
1750-59	-	-	8	20	-	-
1760-69	8	20	20	-	-	-
1770-79	5	-	-	-	21	-
1780-89	13	-	-	-	-	-
1790-99	20	21	-	-	-	-
1800-1808	13	-	30	-	-	5

TABLE 7

Average premiums ¹ : 7-year apprenticeship (IR) by area ²					
	<u>West</u> £	<u>City</u> £	<u>East</u> £	<u>South</u> £	<u>North</u> £
<u>Cabinet-makers</u>					
1723-7	16	10	-	-	-
1743-7	20	32	13	-	-
1763-7	34	12	12	14	-
1783-7	28	19	20	8	-
1803-7	34	20	18	20	30
<u>Upholsterers</u>					
1723-7	31	-	-	-	-
1743-7	31	-	-	-	-
1763-7	49	-	-	-	-
1783-7	63	63	10	55	-
1803-7	64	20	10	20	-
<u>Carvers</u>					
1723-7	8	-	15	-	-
1743-7	23	-	16	-	-
1763-7	21	-	16	16	-
1783-7	24	20	13	24	-
1803-7	28	20	13	20	-
<u>Gilders</u>					
1723-7	6	-	-	-	-
1743-7	24	-	-	-	-
1763-7	19	-	-	-	-
1783-7	11	15	-	-	-
1803-7	23	15	7	13	-

continued ...

Table 7 (continued)

	<u>West</u> £	<u>City</u> £	<u>East</u> £	<u>South</u> £	<u>North</u> £
<u>Carver and Gilders</u>					
1723-7	7	-	-	-	-
1743-7	13	-	-	-	-
1763-7	20	-	25	-	-
1783-7	24	18	-	-	-
1803-7	43	-	-	18	-
<u>Chair-makers</u>					
1723-7	6	15	-	-	-
1743-7	5	-	15	-	-
1763-7	2	-	11	3	-
1783-7	13	10	8	6	-
1803-7	16	-	15	8	5

1 Premiums of less than £1 were not included so as to remove those taken or 'peppercorn' premiums, usually taken when a son or close relative was bound.

2 The broad geographical areas are defined as West, East, South, North and City. City refers to the City of London while the area denoted as West comprises the modern London postal areas of W and WC as well as parts of SW1 and NW1. East is denoted by E and EC postal areas, apart from those which come within the City itself. The Southern area covers the postal areas SE while North includes those denoted by N.

TABLE 8

<u>Seven-year apprenticeships 1711-1808 (IR): as percentage of total</u>						
<u>Date</u>	<u>cabinet-makers</u>	<u>upholsterers</u>	<u>carvers</u>	<u>gilders</u>	<u>carver and gilders</u>	<u>chair- makers</u>
1711-19	92	80	100	50	100	100
1720-29	93	86	95	86	100	100
1730-39	91	92	94	100	100	100
1740-49	89	93	91	100	100	80
1750-59	96	95	94	86	100	100
1760-69	93	89	93	94	100	100
1770-79	91	96	97	82	85	100
1780-89	85	79	93	100	100	100
1790-99	85	75	89	89	100	91
1800-1808	79	68	93	92	100	67

TABLE 9

Apprenticeships of less than 7 years 1711-1808 (IR): as % of total

1711-19	8	20	0	0	0	0
1720-29	4	14	5	14	0	0
1730-39	7	8	6	0	0	0
1740-49	11	7	5	0	0	0
1750-59	4	5	3	0	0	0
1760-69	6	9	5	6	0	0
1770-79	8	4	3	18	13	0
1780-89	13	21	7	0	0	0
1790-99	14	22	11	11	0	9
1800-1808	20	32	5	8	0	31

TABLE 10

Apprenticeships of more than 7 years 1711-1808 (IR): as percentage of total

1711-19	0	0	0	50	0	0
1720-29	3	0	0	0	0	0
1730-39	2	0	0	0	0	0
1740-49	0	0	4	0	0	20
1750-59	0	0	3	14	0	0
1760-69	1	2	2	0	0	0
1770-79	1	0	0	0	2	0
1780-89	2	0	0	0	0	0
1790-99	1	3	0	0	0	0
1800-1808	1	0	2	0	0	2

TABLE 11Apprenticeships of less than 7 years by area (IR): as percentage of total

<u>Date</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>South</u>
A. <u>CABINET-MAKERS</u>				
1723-7	50	0	50	0
1743-7	75	0	25	0
1763-7	67	17	8	8
1783-7	85	15	0	0
1803-7	54	29	4	13
B. <u>UPHOLSTERERS</u>				
1723-7	50	0	50	0
1743-7	0	0	0	0
1763-7	100	0	0	0
1783-7	67	0	0	33
1803-7	86	0	0	14

TABLE 12

Apprenticeship Premiums by Firm¹

	<u>Master/Firm</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Premium (IR)</u>			<u>time</u> <u>years</u>
				<u>£</u>	<u>s</u>	<u>d</u>	
A	<u>Benjamin Goodison</u>	cm	1725	30			7
		cm	1736	20			7
		cm	1741	20			7
		cm	1746	50			
B	<u>William Hallett</u>	cm	1730	15			7
		cm	1733	30			7
		cm	1737	30			7
		cm	1741	30			7
		up	1756	40			7
		up	1764	50			7
C	<u>William Linnell</u>	Cit + j	1730	15			7
		Cit + j	1733	15			7
		Cit + j	1735	30			7
		Cit + j	1744	42			7
		Cit + j	1746	40			7
		Cit + j	1750	20			7
		Cit + j	1752	40			7
		Cit + j	1753	50			7
		Cit + j	1756	50			7
		Cit + j	1756	-			-*
D	<u>Giles Grendey</u>	Cit + j	1731	10	10	0	7
		Cit + j	1731	15			7
		Cit + j	1735	15			7
		Cit + j	1735	20			7
		Cit + j	1737	20			7
		Cit + j	1737	21			7
		Cit + j	1741	40			7
		Cit + j	1741	10			7
		Cit + j	1747	10			-**
		Cit + j	1747	15			7

* Turned over to Linnell

** Turned over to Grendey

continued ...

Table 12 (continued)

	<u>Master/Firm</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Premium (IR)</u>			<u>time</u> <u>years</u>
				<u>£</u>	<u>s</u>	<u>d</u>	
E	<u>William Bradshaw</u>	up	1735	100			7
		up	1735	30			7
F	<u>John West</u>	cm	1745	30			7
		cm	1746	30			7
		cm	1748	40			7
		cm	1752	40			7
		cm	1752	49	15	0	7
		cm	1754	42			7
		cm	1755	84			7
		up	1758	70			7
G	<u>John Trotter</u>	Cit + j	1746	10	10	0	7
		Cit + j	1753	25			7
		Cit + j	1754	200			7
H	<u>John Cobb</u>	cm	1752	49			7
	William Vile and Co.	cm	1752	60			7
		cm	1753	63			7
	John Cobb and Co.	up	1754	30			5
		up	1762	56			7
	John Cobb	up	1762	-	5	0	7 ¹
		up	1768	56			7
I	<u>Thomas Chippendale</u>	cm	1754	20			7
	Rannie and Co.	cm	1758	42			7
	Thomas Chippendale	up	1767	20			4
J	<u>Paul Saunders</u>	c + up	1754	63			7
		c + up	1755	63			7
		c + up	1758	100			7

1. Vile's nephew, William Strickland

continued ...

Table 12 (continued)

	<u>Master/Firm</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Premium (IR)</u>			<u>time</u> <u>years</u>
				<u>£</u>	<u>s</u>	<u>d</u>	
K	<u>George Smith Bradshaw</u>	up	1757	52	10	0	7
		cm	1758	31	10	0	7
		up	1758	84			7
		up	1760	84			7
		up	1763	84			7
		up	1766	79			7
L	<u>Ince and Mayhew</u>	cm etc.	1760	63			7
	John Mayhew	up	1764	105			7
	Ince and Mayhew	cm etc.	1766	157	10	0	7
		cm etc.	1775	210			7
M	<u>William France</u>	up	1764	50			7
	John Bradburn and Co.	cm	1767	70			7
	William France	up	1768	70			7
		up	1768	70			7
		up	1769	20			4
		up	1770	10			2
		up	1770	70			7
N	<u>John Linnell</u>	Cit + j	1764	50			7
		Cit + j	1765	50			7
		Cit + j	1792	0			7
O	<u>Thomas Waldron</u>	cm	1784	40			7
		cm	1787	250			7
P	<u>Richard Gillow and Co.</u>	cm	1771	40			7
	Robert and Richard Gillow	cm	1786	86			7
		cm	1788	36	15	0	7
		up	1788	66			7
		cm	1789	80	10	0	7
		up	1790	70			7
		cm	1791	101	10	0	7
		cm	1791	70			7

continued ...

Table 12 (continued)

<u>Master/Firm</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Premium (IR)</u> £ s d			<u>time</u> years
Messrs. Gillows	cm	1792	20			7
Richard + Robert Gillow and Co.	cm	1792	21			7
	cm	1793	60			7
Messrs. Gillow and Co.	up	1794	21			6
	cm	1796	6	10	0	7
	cm	1796	10			3
	cm	1797	10			7
	cm	1797	10			7
	cm etc.	1801	10			9
Geo. + R. Gillow and Co.	cm	1803	6			7

Q George Seddon, Citizen and Joiner, Apprenticeship Premiums - 1754-94

<u>Date</u>	<u>Apprentice</u>	<u>time</u> years	<u>premium (JCR)</u> £ s d			<u>premium (IR)</u> £ s d		
1754	Cheetham	7	0					
1755	May	7	0					
1756	Samuel	7	13	10	0			
1756	Grove	7	15	15	0			
1756	Jennings	7	18					
1757	Skerrett	7	21			21		
1762	Biggs	7				20		
1762	Jones	7	30			30		
1763	Budd	7	52	10	0	52	10	0
1763	Bott	7	32	10	0	32	10	0
1763	Jennings	7	25					
1763	Rudford	7	0					
1764	Naylor	7	0					
1765	Buck	7	0					
1765	Whitaker	7	30			30		
1766	Richardson	7	14					
1766	Kelby	7				14		
1769	Hunt	7	20			20		
1769	Seddon	7	0					
1773	Frampton	7	105					

continued ...

Table 12 (continued)

(George Seddon)								
<u>Date</u>	<u>Apprentice</u>	<u>time</u> <u>years</u>	<u>premium (JCR)</u>			<u>premium (IR)</u>		
			<u>£</u>	<u>s</u>	<u>d</u>	<u>£</u>	<u>s</u>	<u>d</u>
1773	Rylance	7	0					
1774	Webber	7	20			20		
1775	Seddon	7	0					
1776	Dixwell	7	0					
1777	Pile	7	0					
1777	Seddon	7	0					
1778	Rhodes	7	0					
1778	Hurst	7	10	10	0	10	10	0
1780	Hinchliff	7	105					
1781	Kershaw	7	0					
1784	Bowness	7	20			15		
1785	Leach	7	10			5		
1785	Bowness	7	21					
1785	Eustace	7	12					
1786	Bennett	7	31	10	0			
1787	Cooper	7	20			20		
1787	Jones	7	18					
1787	Milward	7	20			20		
1787	Fildes	7	0					
1789	Fildes	7	0					
1791	Wallace	7	0					
1794	Morris	7	0					

1 cm = cabinet-maker; up = upholsterer and Cit + j = Citizen and Joiner, denoting membership of the Joiners' Company

A P P E N D I X I I

TABLE 1

<u>Furniture patents taken out by furniture-makers 1700-1853</u>						
<u>Category</u> ¹	<u>Number of furniture</u> <u>-makers</u>			<u>Furniture makers as</u> <u>% of total</u>		
	<u>London</u>	<u>Provinces</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>London</u>	<u>Provinces</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>CABINET</u>						
I Cabinet-ware	5	1	6	18	4	22
II Tables	10	2	12	42	8	50
III Chairs, sofas etc.	9	2	11	32	7	39
IV Bedsteads, couches, etc.	9	5	14	16	9	25
VII Castors, etc.	2	0	2	5	0	5
VIII Fastenings	4	1	5	36	9	45
<u>UPHOLSTERY</u>						
I Beds, pillows, mattresses, curtains	4	2	6	15	7	22
II Window curtains and blinds	4	0	4	17	0	17
III Suspending and winding- up curtains	1	0	1	4	0	4
IV Cleaning and laying carpets	1	0	1	25	0	25

¹ The categories are those used in Bennet Woodcroft, Patents of Inventions 1617-1853, Subject Matter Index, 1854 under i) Furniture and Cabinet-ware and ii) Upholstery. The chronological indexes of Patents of Inventions vols. I and II, were used for descriptions of the patents and the occupations of the patentees.

TABLE 2 (continued)

<u>Patents by Furniture-Makers 1617-1853²</u>				
A. <u>Furniture and Cabinet-Ware</u>				
<u>Date</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Occupation³</u>
<u>I CABINET-WARE</u>				
1774	1086	Campbell	St. Giles-in-the-Fields	cm
1813	3677	Bennett	Bristol (P)	cm
1836	7189	Jupe	Bond Street	cm
1841	9130	Macauley	Curtain Road	up
1844	10332	Ramuz	Frith Street	cm
1849	12791	Meadows	Coventry Street	c ^r + g ^r
<u>II TABLES</u>				
1786	1579	Cairncross	Greek Street	cm
1800	2393	Marshal	St. Anne, Soho	cm
1800	2396	Gillow	Oxford Street	cm
1802	2657	Walker	Marylebone	cm
1803	2727	Laver	Bury St. Edmonds (P)	cm + up
1805	2895	Pocock	Covent Garden	cm + up
1805	2898	Brown	City of London	cm
1807	3090	Remington	Bloomsbury	cm
1810	3339	Stewart	St. Martins-in-the-Fields	cm
1835	6788	Jupe	New Bond Street	up
1844	10332	Ramuz	Frith Street	cm
1846	11194	Riddett	Isle of Wight (P)	up
1847	11699	Norman	Finsbury	cm

TABLE 2 (continued)

<u>Date</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Occupation</u> ³
III	<u>CHAIRS, SOFAS AND SIMILAR ARTICLES</u>			
1800	2420	Elwick	Wakefield (P)	up
1813	3699	Thackray	Windmill Street	cm
1827	5490	Daws	Margaret Street	up
1828	5700	Miniken	Berwick Street	cm
1830	6034	Minter	Princes Street	cm, up + chair mfr.
1833	6380	Lutton	Dean Street	chair m
1838	7799	Brown	The Minories	up
1840	8349	Hall	Glasgow (P)	up
1844	10332	Ramuz	Frith Street	cm
1845	10918	Minter + Badger)	Gerard Street Walworth, Surrey)	patent chair mfr. carpenter + builder
1850	13213	Kane	Berners Mews	chair m
IV	<u>BEDSTEADS AND COUCHES</u>			
1766	860	Dickinson) + Sedgier)	St. Clement Danes Shire Lane	up cm
1772	1002	Gale	St. Mary-le-Strand	up
1785	1483	Waldron	Catherine Street	up
1807	3090	Remington	Bloomsbury	cm
1811	3467	Badstone	Bridgewater, Somerset (P)	cm
1812	3539	Figgins	Portsmouth (P)	up
1812	3597	Paxon	Hampstead	up
1815	3910	Wilson	Welbeck Street	cm + up
1838	7592	Dale	Potteries (P)	turner
1839	8320	Thompson	Long Acre	up
1840	8349	Hall	Glasgow (P)	up
1842	9346	Wilson	Wigmore Street	up
1843	9758	Farmer) + Pitt)	Birmingham (P) Birmingham (P)	up + cm plumber and brass-founder
1844	10332	Ramuz	Frith Street	cm

TABLE 2 (continued)

<u>Date</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Occupation</u>
V	<u>WORK-BOXES, MUSIC STANDS, DRESSING BOXES, etc.</u>			
		none		
VI	<u>FIRE-SCREENS</u>			
		none		
VII	<u>CASTORS, KNOBS AND HANDLES</u>			
1834	6721	Lutton	Tottenham Court Road	chair m
1850	13213	Kane	Berners Mews	chair m
VIII	<u>FASTENINGS</u>			
1786	1579	Cairncross	Greek Street	cm
1801	2542	Bullock	Portland Street	cm
1831	6188	Minter	Princes Street	cm + up
1839	8330	Hardeman	Birmingham (P)	cm
1844	10361	Osmond	Tottenham Court Road	cm

TABLE 2 (continued)

B. <u>Upholstery</u>					
<u>Date</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Address</u>		<u>Occupation</u>
I <u>MAKING AND FILLING BEDS, PILLOWS, MATTRESSES AND CUSHIONS</u>					
1815	3910	Wilson	Welbeck Street		cm + up
1826	5700	Miniken	Berwick Street		cm
1838	7799	Brown	The Minories		up
1840	8349	Hall	Glasgow	(P)	up
1841	8861	Wilkie +) Schwieso)	Nassau Street St. Pancras		up musical instr- ument maker
1843	9758	Farmer) + Pitt)	Birmingham Birmingham	(P) (P)	up + cm plumber + brass-founder
II <u>MAKING WINDOW CURTAINS AND BLINDS</u>					
1776	1142	Lewis	Fleet Street		up
1777	1162	Lewis	Fleet Street		up
1821	4603	Tuely	Kenton Street		cm
1823	4828	Barron) + Wilson)	Wells Street Welbeck Street		venetian- blind mfr. up
III <u>SUSPENDING AND WINDING UP CURTAINS ETC.</u>					
1777	1164	Small	St. James's		up
IV <u>CLEANSING AND LAYING CARPETS</u>					
1851	13549	Horn	Mayfair		up + decorator

2 See footnote 1

3 cm = cabinet-maker; up = upholsterer; cm + up = cabinet-maker and upholsterer;
c^r + g^r = carver and gilder; chair m = chair-maker; mfr. = manufacturer

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